

Stavroula Constantinou

FEMALE CORPOREAL PERFORMANCES

Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions
and Lives of Holy Women

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Abstract

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This study argues that the religious acts and behaviour depicted in Byzantine hagiography can be seen as performances. The martyr, the monk/nun, the patriarch and the cross-dresser, for instance, are roles undertaken by the heroes and heroines of Byzantine hagiography in order to serve God and achieve sanctity. In this study, the most important roles of female sanctity are approached as depicted in Passions and Lives of holy women through investigating the heroines' bodies which play a vital role in the performance of religious behaviour and the construction of sanctity. The study thus exploits performance theory which suggests that daily life consists of various and repeated performances including particular embodied acts realised in specific places and witnessed by others and/or the watching self. Here such performances are observed and examined in the roles of the martyr, the penitent, the cross-dresser, the nun, the abbess and the pious wife.

Key-words: saint's Life, male and female Life, Passion, martyr, repentant prostitute, holy cross-dresser, abbess, nun, holy wife, gender, genre, body, performance, spectacle, audience, gaze.

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To Angeliki

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Stavroula Constantinou

Contents

INTRODUCTION	11
The Male and the Female Saint's Life	11
Types of Sainthood and Performance	13
Corporeal Performances	15
The Shape of this Study	17
1 THE SPECTACULAR BODY OF THE FEMALE MARTYR	19
Introduction	19
The Scene of Martyrdom	30
Creating the Scene	30
The Female Martyr's Body under Sexual Violence	34
The Power of the Martyr's Body	38
The Speaking Body	48
The Body as Text – The Text as Body	53
2 THE THREE BODIES OF THE REPENTANT PROSTITUTE	59
Introduction	59
The Sinful Body	64
The Sinful Body from the External Narrator's Perspective	66
The Sinful Body from a Male Character's Perspective	69
The Sinful Body from the Central Heroine's Perspective	77
The Repentant Body	78
The Holy Body	85
3 THE MAKING, REMAKING AND UNMAKING OF THE GENDERED BODY: THE CASE OF THE HOLY CROSS-DRESSER	90
Introduction	90
Making: The First Transformation	106

Remaking: The Second Transformation	117
Unmaking: The Unmasking of the Cross-Dressers' Sex	120
 4 LIFE IN THE NUNNERY: THE EXEMPLARY BODY OF THE ABBESS AND THE OBEDIENT BODY OF THE NUN	 127
Introduction	127
The Exemplary Body of the Abbess	134
The Abbess' Deeds	134
The Abbess' Words	144
The Obedient Body of the Nun	150
The Nun under the Abbess' Control	150
The Nun as the Abbess' Double	157
 5 "SHE ADORNED HERSELF WITH WOUNDS AS WITH PEARLS": THE HOLY WIFE'S BODY AND ITS SPATIAL PERFORMANCES	 162
Introduction	162
Public Performances	167
The Domestic Body	178
Saintly Afterlife: The Place of the Holy Wife	193
 CONCLUSION	 197
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 217
 INDEX LOCORUM	 217
 GENERAL INDEX	 224

Introduction

The Male and the Female Saint's Life

An important point of departure for the present study is the notion that the Byzantine genre of the saint's Life may be divided into two subgenres according to gender: the male and the female saint's Life (Constantinou 2004). Gender is employed here in a feminist sense: "male" and "female" are categories that are socially constructed. This means that the individuals who belong to the respective gender are expected to possess the attributes and perform according to the behaviour considered by their society as male or female (Humm 1995: 106–108).

The criterion for this subgeneric division of the saint's Life is not the gender of the hagiographers, who in their large majority are men, but the gender of the saints to whom the Lives are devoted. Accordingly, male Lives are the texts having male saints as their protagonists, whereas the Lives whose protagonists are holy women are female. The reason for this "gendered" subgeneric distinction is mainly the fact that the Lives of holy women share a number of characteristics which set them apart from the vast majority of the Lives venerating male saints, which, in turn, have their own common features.

Both the male and the female Life may be subdivided into certain categories through which the differences between the two subgenres become more obvious since the male Life has subdivisions, which the female Life does not have and vice-versa (Constantinou 2004: 419–420). I suggest that the subdivisions of each subgenre are formed according to the different types of sainthood manifested in the texts. The term "types of sainthood" refers to the various forms of religious life adopted by men and women, such as those of the abbot/abbess, the monk/nun, the cross-dresser and the solitary, in order to show God their entire devotion and effectively to achieve holiness. Various types of sainthood such as the solitary and the patriarch have already been applied by scholars for the

groupings of hagiographical texts.¹ However, these saintly types have been employed only as a thematic criterion; to what extent they determine the structures, the functions and the audiences of the texts has not been examined.

The various types of holiness constitute subdivisions of the two subgenres because the texts in which a certain saintly type is depicted share a number of common characteristics which differentiate them from the other texts whose protagonists follow different roads leading to holiness. If, for example, the central heroine of a Life becomes a cenobitic cross-dresser, the plot has the following sequence: it starts with the heroine's life before the cross-dressing act. Then her decision to cross-dress is presented. Her transformation into a man follows. Later she enters a male monastery. Immediately afterwards her life as a cenobitic monk is depicted. At some point her identity as a man causes problems both to herself and her community and finally her female nature is revealed. The Life of a cross-dresser—especially that of the cross-dresser who is accused of fathering a child—contains an element of suspense that is not shared by the Lives of other holy women such as the abbess, the solitary, the defender of images and the pious wife. When the protagonist of a Life is an abbot or an abbess the text has a different structure and content. In this case the text focuses on the abbot's or abbess' behaviour in the monastery and the way in which he or she treats his or her disciples. In the men's case, their actions outside the monastery are also stressed. The abbess, on the other hand, only rarely leaves her convent.²

¹ Hippolyte Delehaye often organised his studies on hagiography according to types of sainthood, e.g. "les saints stylites" (Delehaye 1923) and "les saints militaires" (Delehaye 1909). The Lives included in the volume *Holy Women of Byzantium* (Talbot 1996) in the series *Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation* are arranged according to different types of female holiness (solitaries, nuns, pious housewives etc). The second volume of the same series is devoted to one saintly type, the defender of images (Talbot 1998). Stephanos Efthymiadis has suggested that the Lives of patriarchs constitute a hagiographical subgenre (Efthymiadis 1998: 3–6).

² More common elements among the female Lives depicting the same type of holiness will be discussed in the present study.

Types of Sainthood and Performance

I shall argue that these different types of sainthood, both male and female, are in fact religious roles undertaken by the heroes and heroines in order to serve God. For the application of the theatrical concept of role-playing to hagiography I was originally inspired by the sociologist Erving Goffman, who perceives social behaviour as "performed". In his study *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman suggests that different forms of social behaviour are like theatrical roles because they are imitative acts realised before an audience and have to fulfil certain expectations depending on the social performer's appearance, gestures and discourse.³ According to Goffman, a social performance aspires to influence its observers.

In their literary representations, saints re-enact specific religious roles which they perform before God, the devil and/or a human audience. The human audience is situated both internally and externally in relation to the texts. The internal human audience consists of the saints' disciples and the laypeople who encounter them. The external audience is the intended one consisting of Christians of Late Antiquity and the Byzantine era; it experiences the saints' performances through a reading of or listening to the texts. Saintly roles are intended, in the first place, to please God and to attack God's enemy, the devil. In the second place, they aim at influencing the internal and external audience's opinions and actions. In fact, the influence on the external audience is one of the main objectives of hagiography. Hagiographical texts are written for edification; they provide their audiences with models of Christian behaviour.

Like social roles, saintly roles are reinforced in their theatrical character through costumes and the saints' physical appearance. A martyr,

³ While working on the idea that the forms of religious behaviour leading to holiness are theatrical, I found out that Goffman's argument about the theatrical aspects of the self in everyday life is not a modern one. It goes back to antiquity (Kokolakis 1960). In the Christian era, the Church Fathers believed that real life was found in Heaven and that life on earth was a theatre (Vivilakes 1997). As for Byzantium, some Byzantine writers saw life as a stage on which people's fates were enacted. In a consolatory letter to his brother Tarasios on the death of his daughter, patriarch Photios presented their situation after the girl's death as a tragedy (*Epist.* 234.36–41). Theodore Metochites employed the notion that life is a theatre in order to describe the changeable nature of life, the quick and unexpected transformation from happiness into unhappiness and vice-versa (Beck 1952: 96–114). In general, theatrical terminology was employed by a number of Byzantine authors such as Psellos and Eustathios of Thessalonike (see e.g. Agapitos 1998; Papaioannou 2003).

for instance, wears his/her nakedness; a cross-dresser a monk's cassock; a solitary very few pieces of old, shabby cloth or hard leather that tears the body to pieces. As for physical appearance, a penitent, for example, is skinny, dirty and ugly, whereas a female martyr is extremely beautiful. In addition, each religious role has its own discourse characterised by theatrical elements. A holy fool imitates the discourse of the "mad". A martyr and his/her pagan opponent engage in a dramatic dialogue witnessed by countless spectators.

The idea that religious life and behaviour have theatrical aspects goes back to the Church Fathers. In his homilies, John Chrysostom advised his audience to go out and see the holy men and their performances (*Hom. in Mat.* 69.4, PG 58: 654; *Hom. in I Tim.* 14.3, PG 62: 575). Chrysostom believed that true sanctity can be seen in a person's appearance and behaviour. As Blake Leyerle characteristically states, "in this emphasis on the visual, sanctity shared much with the world of the stage" (Leyerle 2001: 76). That saintly behaviour is spectacular is also acknowledged by Byzantine hagiographers themselves. Ignatios the Deacon, for instance, writes in the Life of Gregory of Dekapolis (*BHG* 711):

Such is the angelic crowd of the ascetic wrestling-school [...]: they set up their life as a spectacle on earth, in which the one who gathers an image of edification, makes himself into a dwelling of the very godly trinity.⁴

Τοιοῦτος καὶ ὁ τῆς ἀσκητικῆς παλαίστρας ἀγγελοφανέστατος ὄμιλος [...] θέατρον ἐπὶ γῆς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ βίον στηλώσας ἀνέθηκεν, ἐν ᾧ πᾶς τις ὠφελείας ἰδέαν συναγερκῶς τῆς ὑπερθέου τριάδος ἑαυτὸν οἰκητήριον δείκνυσιν. (*VGregDec* Proem, 35 and 37–39)

The above quotation suggests that Ignatios understands ascetic life as a form of theatre directed at pious spectators, who in turn should imitate this way of life. Ignatios outlines the mechanisms at work during the achievement of piety and holiness: in order to become a saint or pious, an individual should imitate a former saint. Behind every saint's performance there is a model, just as there is a model behind every form of performance whether social or theatrical (Bauman 1989).

In general, Byzantine Lives draw primarily on the Bible for most of the roles of sanctity they depict and for their corresponding models (Ashbrook-Harvey 1990: 37; Brock and Ashbrook-Harvey 1987: 14; Coon 1997:

⁴ When the name of the translator is not indicated, the translation is mine.

1–51). Saints' lives are modelled on the life of Christ. Many holy women are presented as having the Virgin Mary as their example. These are very often, for obvious reasons, female saints who undertake the role of a saint's mother (Martha, mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger) or virgins (martyrs, nuns, abbesses etc). The Virgin Mary functions as an ideal also for a former prostitute, namely her namesake Mary the Egyptian, after the latter decides to give up her sinful life. All the repentant prostitutes re-enact Mary Magdalene's life.

Very often holy men have other male saints as their examples. Saint Antony, for instance, functions as an important model for male piety. Athanasios, Antony's hagiographer, says in the prologue of the Life that he writes about Antony's conduct in order to offer to the Egyptian monks a pattern of pious life that should be imitated (*VAnt* Proem, 1.7–13). Holy women, on the other hand, look to female saints. The first female martyr, Thecla, is one of the main examples inspiring holy women such as Macrina (*VMacr* ch.2.21–34) and Synkletike (*VSync* p.187.47–59). Of course, there are instances in which male and female saints serve as models for both men and women (Ashbrook-Harvey 1990: 38; Rapp 1996). Irene of Chrysobalanton, for example, reads the Lives of male saints. Her model is Saint Arsenios whose standing exercises she imitates (*VIrChrys* p.16.17–22). In his *Historia Religiosa* (30.7.5–10), Theodoret of Cyrrihus writes that he relates not only holy men's stories, but also those of female saints so that everyone will be provided with both male and female models for imitation.

Corporeal Performances

I shall, in the present study, approach some of the female roles of holiness as depicted in Passions and Lives of holy women by investigating the heroines' bodies, which play a vital role in the performance of religious behaviour and the construction of sanctity. Female roles of sanctity are basically formed according to how a heroine treats her body, or allows it to be treated. The martyr wins the crown of holiness by defending the Christian faith in a pagan world with her virginal body and her blood (see Chapter 1). The penitent becomes a saint through renouncing her life as a sinner, during which she is depicted as interested in her bodily pleasures and the beautiful appearance of her body. After the abandonment of her sinful life, the penitent punishes her body for its

sins by leading an ascetic life during which her body loses all its beauty and sexual attractiveness (see Chapter 2). The cross-dresser acquires sanctity by effacing her femaleness and beauty under a monk's cassock and through a harsh ascetic life (see Chapter 3). The nun owes her sanctity to the ascetic life and the obedient body she presents within the confines of a nunnery. The abbess is sanctified for her exemplary body (see Chapter 4). The pious wife is a saint because she undergoes the martyrdom of marriage. She is beaten and dishonoured by her husband, whose behaviour recalls that of the pagan emperor who tortures the martyr (see Chapter 5). The solitary is the female saint who devotes herself to God in solitude where she undergoes self-torture. The virgin becomes a saint because she manages to save her virginity, which is threatened by a man who falls in love with her. The difference between the martyr and the virgin is that the virgin is not made to undergo torments. The mother of a saint achieves sanctity for giving birth to and bringing up a saint.

In fact, the Byzantine Lives of holy women confirm the statement of Mary Malone that "the history of Christianity for women can be seen, in large part, as the history of Christian attitudes toward women's bodies and women's efforts to live with integrity in these bodies" (Malone 2000: 116). The suppression of the body is also a vital element of a male saint's asceticism, and the laceration of a male martyr's body is what provides him with the glory of sanctity. Nevertheless, the male body is not as central in the construction of male sanctity as is the female body in the creation of female holiness. In contrast to their male counterparts, holy women achieve sanctity almost exclusively through their bodies, as the above definition of female roles of sanctity demonstrates. Male saints, on the other hand, acquire sanctity not mainly through their bodies, but through their (political) actions and achievements.

Another key concept of the literary analysis conducted here is performance. "Performance", which derives from theatrical vocabulary, has been employed not only by Goffman but also by a number of other theorists in order to describe a wide range of cultural activity. In addition to aspects of everyday life, performance can refer to arts, literature, popular entertainments, speech acts, conference behaviour, rituals and religious healing. In its social and cultural context, performance is the result of speech acts and/or the movements of the human body realised in a given occasion and a particular place before an audi-

ence or the watching self (Carlson 1996; Schechner 2002). Thus performance and human body are tightly linked to each other. It is through the performer's corporeal presence, appearance and behaviour under the spectators' gaze that a performance takes place.

In the context of literary studies, performance is employed in order to describe the process of reading and interpreting (Hawthorn 2000: 256–257; Issacharoff and Jones 1988; Neumann et al. 2000). The reading of a text is a performing act: through seeing each single word of which a text consists, a reader "performs" this text in his/her mind. During the course of reading, the reader "sees" with his/her mind's eye also a whole (literary) world: the objects, the animals or the people described by the author and the scenes where various incidents occur. What the reader "sees" and thinks while reading a literary text determines his/her interpretation of it.

My use of the concept of performance applies to literary texts which focus on performative cultural practices such as rituals and religious behaviour and healings, as well as to texts that are "theatrical". Theatrical or dramatic are not only the works of playwrights, but also other literary texts which include elements creating effects originating in theatrical contexts. Such elements are techniques and vocabularies deriving from theatre and narrated scenes which recall plays witnessed by audiences situated within the texts. As for Byzantine saints' Lives, their performative aspects lie in the first place in the various roles of holiness undertaken by the protagonists of the texts. In the case of female Lives, one discerns a strong emphasis upon the heroines' bodily performances, on how their bodies and identities are articulated through the roles they enact. The performative aspects of many saints' Lives are also to be found in the theatrical character of the texts themselves, as I will attempt to show here.

The Shape of this Study

For the present analysis a selection of six of the above-mentioned female roles has been made. These are the following: the martyr, the penitent, the cross-dresser, the nun, the abbess and the pious wife. These particular roles have been chosen because of the importance that the number of texts in which they are manifested seems to suggest. Roles that are manifested in only one or two texts have been found less important

and are not investigated here. For example, the role of the virgin is depicted only in the Life of Mary of Antioch (*VMarAnt BHG* 1045) and that of the mother of a saint in the Life of Martha (*VMartha BHG* 1174). The role of the defender of images appears in the Life of Theodora the Empress (*VTheod BHG* 1731) and in the Life of Theodosia (*VTheodos BHG* 1773y). The role of the solitary is undertaken mostly by heroines who also enact other roles of sainthood. Exceptions are the Life of Theoktiste (*VTheoc BHG* 1723–1724) and the Life of Synkletike (*VSynk BHG* 1694). I would like to point out that Synkletike's hagiography, in particular, is not a typical Life. It is a hybrid text in which the saint's Life has been combined with elements from the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. The textual corpus used for the analysis consists of thirty-three texts (Passions and Lives) in Greek, dating from the fourth/fifth to the fourteenth century. The respective Passions and Lives will be presented at the beginning of each chapter. The Passions and Lives of the Symeon Metaphrastes' collection have not been included.

The purpose of the present examination is twofold: I should like to present the characteristics of the female saint's Life, but also to bring to light texts which have never received any critical attention. This is not a comparative examination of Byzantine male and female Passions and Lives, even though such issues are sometimes addressed. My aim is not to stress the similarities or differences between the two subgenres, but to approach a corpus of female Passions and Lives which, despite the obvious similarities, can—and should—be interpreted independently.

The study has been divided into five chapters. The first chapter examines the role of the martyr, the second that of the holy penitent and the third considers the holy cross-dresser. The fourth chapter is a comparative examination of the roles of the nun and the abbess. The last chapter is concerned with the role of the pious wife.

CHAPTER 1

The Spectacular Body of the Female Martyr

Introduction

The legends of martyrs, in contrast to hagiographical texts in which other roles of sainthood are depicted, have received almost no scholarly attention.¹ The indifference of Byzantinists toward martyrs and their legends stands in opposition to the high interest that the Byzantines themselves showed in these texts and their heroes. Most of the Byzantine hagiographical texts that have come down to us venerate martyrs. As far as legends of holy women are concerned, more than half of them have martyrs as their protagonists. Symeon Metaphrastes' work, the most popular hagiographical collection in Byzantium, contains 148 texts, 78 of which are devoted to martyrs (Høgel 1996: 8, 13 and 2002: 173–204). The large number of manuscripts in which legends of martyrs are transmitted demonstrates that in Byzantine times these texts did not fall into obscurity, far from it; they were continuously read, copied and reworked (Ehrhard 1936–1952).

The main reason why Byzantinists have remained uninterested in martyrs' legends may be associated with the way in which hagiography has frequently been treated in Byzantine studies. With a few exceptions, hagiographical texts are used as sources from which historical information can be extracted (Høgel 1997). In the general introduction to the volume *Holy Women of Byzantium*, for instance, the editor points out the great significance of the Lives included in the volume for the information they provide about attitudes towards Byzantine

¹ The monumental work of Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, published in 1921, has found almost no successors among Byzantinists. Apart from Delehaye's work, there is no monograph on martyrs' legends. The limited interest showed by Byzantinists is restricted to a few articles referring mainly to the martyrs' legends which were included in Symeon Metaphrastes' hagiographical collection (see e.g. Efthymiadis 1991; Høgel 1996; Lackner 1984).

women and households, female spiritual life, monasteries and monastic life as well as popular cults (Talbot 1996a: xv). In this account there is no mention of the literary aspect of these texts.

Martyr legends, which are entirely excluded from *Holy Women of Byzantium*, have been seen by Byzantinists as texts without any historical value, since most of them were produced much later than the time when the actual martyrdoms took place, and their protagonists therefore are fictitious (Beck 1959: 270; Delehaye 1966: 171–226). Another reason why martyr legends may be considered uninteresting for Byzantinists is that their plots, unlike the Lives of other saints, are set in an era in which the Byzantine empire did not exist. In fact, the study of martyr legends offers important information about martyrs' cults in Byzantium, the popularity of certain martyrs, and also the interests and tastes of Byzantine audiences demanding such an enormous production of narratives devoted to martyrs.

Close reading of martyr legends from a literary perspective reveals that an important feature of these narratives is their theatricality, which is achieved both by the role which the martyr performed before an audience and the dramatic elements of the narrative. Very often Byzantine hagiographers employ theatrical terminology when they narrate the scenes of martyrdom. In Euphemia's Passion (*BHG* 619d), for example, the hagiographer calls the audience of Euphemia's tortures "spectators" (θεαταί, *PEuph* ch.2). In another text, the Life of Thecla (*BHG* 1717), the word "theatre" (θέατρον) is employed by the hagiographer to indicate both the spectators (*VThec* ch.12.5, ch.19.5) and the place of martyrdom, when this is the amphitheatre (*VThec* ch.21.34). Apart from the use of theatrical terms, the hagiographers give the scenes devoted to martyrdom a highly dramatic form, with the result that these scenes recall plays that are watched by both an internal audience, the one appearing in the texts, and an external audience consisting of the Byzantine readers of or listeners to the texts.

Given that martyrdom as depicted in martyr legends has a prominent theatrical form, the role of the martyr is, in contrast to the other roles of sanctity, literally theatrical. The martyr appears to perform on a stage that is set up by the pagans. On this very stage, the martyr's body, scraped with claws, pierced with knives, roasted, whipped and mauled by beasts, is the centre and the means of a performance affecting the audience.

The role of the martyr may be seen as the result of certain historical circumstances: during the first Christian centuries Christians were persecuted and many of them were tortured in public for their reluctance to follow pagan religious customs, such as the sacrifice to the pagan gods of the Roman state (Fox 1986; Frend 1965). Martyrdom took the form of a public test of Christian faith. The martyr was by definition the witness who testified to the Christian truth and was prepared to die for it (Straw 2000). The martyr's trial and bodily punishment constituted public spectacles which took place in the arena and were watched by numerous spectators, both Christian and pagan (Perkins 1995: 15–40).

The martyr's public punishment exhibited both an individual and a communal character: the individual was made to suffer for being connected to the Christian community, and the Christian community, in turn, was punished by losing its members. Like the martyr's punishment, the role of the audience also had a twofold character: a communal one and an individual one. The audience was gathered as a group in order to make the martyrdom's public form possible. The fear which the tortures of the punished were supposed to provoke, aimed at influencing each individual member of the audience, pagan as well as Christian. The fear caused by tortures was expected, on one hand, to prevent pagans from converting to Christianity, and, on the other, to convince Christians to renounce their faith.

Obviously, Byzantine legends of martyrs reflect the historical reality of the martyrdom's public and theatrical character which was acknowledged also by early Christian theologians. In his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Origen, referring to martyrdom and its realisation, speaks of a great theatre filled with countless spectators watching the martyrs' contests and their summons to martyrdom (18.24–27). In his *Enkomion on Stephen the Protomartyr*, Gregory of Nyssa asks each individual in his audience to take an imaginary journey in his or her mind to the theatre of Stephen's martyrdom while listening to his speech (704.11).

Theatricality and the insistence on corporeality are two of the most essential common elements between male and female martyr legends. Another similarity between these legends is their structure, which is usually the following: the saint is arrested, brought before the prefect, and asked to participate in pagan sacrifices. He or she refuses, affirms the Christian doctrines, destroys temples and idols, works miracles, under-

goes torture, and eventually dies by decapitation.

In martyr legends, however, there are elements which suggest a gender-based approach. Unlike male martyr legends, most legends of female martyrs are characterised by a preoccupation with sexuality: the heroines' virginity is at constant risk, and their religious persecution is directly related to their reluctance to lose their chastity (Wilson 1995). In some cases a pagan falls in love with the saint, woos her, and eventually leads her to martyrdom for rejecting his love. Such examples are the legends of Marina of Antioch and Thecla. In other cases, the legend of Catherine is one example, the torturer falls in love with the virgin saint who is brought before him. He offers to marry her, but is rejected.

In male martyr legends, on the other hand, what connects the saints with pagans is not erotic desire from the pagans' side, but a close friendship. In the legend of Sergios and Bakchos (*PSergBacch BHG* 1624), for example, the two saints are friends of the emperor Maximian, who sees their Christianity as a betrayal of their friendship. Maximian takes away from the two heroes the signs of his friendship, which are the honours he has offered them, and humiliates them by dressing them in women's clothes and having them dragged in chains around the city centre.

In contrast, the torture of female martyrs who reject the love offered to them reflects the sexual desire of their tormentors. These heroines are stripped naked, beaten and brought to a brothel. They are shaved or hung up by their long hair. Their breasts or nipples are cut off. Thus, unlike the male martyr's body, that of the female martyr is treated as a sexual object. The female martyr legends draw attention to the beauty of the holy woman's nakedness. The attention of the texts' audiences is focused on the desired but forbidden female body which very often functions as an object providing voyeuristic pleasure. In contrast to the male martyr's body, that of the female martyr is defined according to the status of virginity. Virginity is crucial to the construction of the heroines' identities as martyrs, since the large majority of female martyrs are virgins and many of them are tortured for not offering their virginity to the men who fall in love with them.

The obsession of most Byzantine legends of female martyrs with sexuality may be explained as a need on the part of a male Byzantine audience of a form of literature which offered sexual entertainment

appearing less "harmful" under the guise of piety. The popularity of the Passions of female martyrs throughout the Byzantine era in particular, and the Middle Ages in general, could also be attributed to the fact that these texts provided erotic pleasure.² It is also no coincidence that the Lives of holy prostitutes, which too have erotic elements, enjoyed high popularity in the Middle Ages (see below, Chapter 2).

In some legends of female martyrs, such as those of Barbara, Irene and Christina, fathers play a prominent role. The beautiful heroines are enclosed in towers by their jealous fathers in order to keep them away from the eyes of men. Eventually, some of these fathers become the torturers of their own daughters. With the exception of Thecla's mother, who is against her daughter and plays a major role in the heroine's first trial and tortures, female martyrs' mothers are not opposed to their daughters. In general, mothers are almost absent from female martyrs' legends. In male martyrs' legends, on the contrary, fathers play a minor role, whereas mothers have a major role. Mothers offer their sons Christian education and encourage them to become martyrs to their faith.

Another difference between male and female martyr legends is revealed in the offers that pagans make to the protagonists in order to convince them to renounce their faith. To male martyrs they usually offer high office, honours and money, whereas to female martyrs they offer glorious marriages, jewellery and ornaments. These gender-specific offers reflect the realities of a medieval male-dominated society such as Byzantium, in which the pursuit of a political career, and the acquisition of social honours were reserved for men. Women were expected to be interested in marriage (Laiou 1981).

My main aim in this chapter is to highlight the theatricality of the martyr's role as depicted in Byzantine legends of martyrs. For this purpose the following texts will be used: the Passion of Catherine (*PAec BHG* 30), the Passion of Agape, Irene and Chione (*PAGlrCh BHG* 34), the Passion of Agnes (*PAGn BHG* 46), the Passion of Anastasia of Rome (*PANastRom BHG* 81–81a), the Passion of Barbara (*PBar BHG* 213), the Passion of Christina (*PChr BHG* 302), the Passion of Febronia (*PFeb BHG* 659), the Passion of Irene (*PIr BHG* 953), the Passion of Lucy

² For the function of Byzantine hagiography as a form of sexual entertainment, see Kazhdan 1990. Kazhdan excludes from his account the hagiographical texts on martyrs. An inclusion of these texts would, in my view, have made his argument more persuasive.

(*PLuc BHG* 995), the Passion of Marina of Antioch (*PMarAnt BHG* 1165), the Passion of Paraskeve (*PPar BHG* 1420p), the Passion of Photeine (*PPh BHG* 1541), the Passion of Pistis, Elpis and Agape (*PPisEL-Ag BHG* 1637y), the Passion of Tatiane (*PTat BHG* 1699) and the Life of Thecla (*VThec BHG* 1717). A summary of these texts and their contents will be given before we move on to the analysis proper.

Unfortunately most of these texts cannot be dated since martyr legends were used in their original form or in reworkings over long periods of time. Almost all of the authors of the examined texts are anonymous. To achieve credibility some hagiographers inserted into their texts an imaginary figure who appears as a contemporary of the saint and presents himself or herself as the author of the saint's acts.³ Usually this fictitious hagiographer is related to the saint in a certain way: he is her servant (Anastasios in the Passion of Catherine), her teacher (Abelianos in the Passion of Irene), or the man who collected her dead body and buried it, after having witnessed her martyrdom (Theotimos in the Passion of Marina of Antioch). In Febronia's Passion the fictitious author is a woman, a certain Thomaïs, who used to be a fellow nun of Febronia.

The plot of the Passion of Agape, Irene and Chione is set in Thessalonike in March and April of 304 (Delehay 1966: 103–104; Musurillo 1972: xlii–xliii). Agape, Irene and Chione are three sisters, who, as soon as Maximian's persecutions against the Christians begin, flee from Thessalonike with their companions, and go to some near-by mountains (it is not indicated in the text which ones). They are, however, arrested and brought before the prefect who interrogates them all together. Agape and Chione, being the oldest of the group, are burnt alive after the interrogation while the others are imprisoned. A day later Irene is interrogated alone. Eventually she is also burnt alive.

The legend of Agnes was written in the fifth century. Agnes, one of the most famous Roman martyrs, is supposed to have died around 305. The Latin version of Agnes' legend was adapted into many medieval vernacular languages (Farmer 1997: 7). According to her legend, Agnes was arrested for refusing to marry the prefect's son who was madly in love with her. She underwent torture and was finally killed by a sword piercing her throat.

³ This technique is also employed by hagiographers of legendary male martyrs, see Delehay 1966: 182–183.

The Passion of Anastasia of Rome is an adaptation of a Latin original, made in 824 by a certain Theodore, a deacon and *oikonomos* of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Delehay 1936: 155–156). Anastasia is a noble Roman woman married to a man called Pouplios. In the guise of a poor woman and followed by one of her servants Anastasia goes to the prisons where the Christian martyrs are kept to support them and look after their wounds. When her husband finds out about this, he confines her at home. After Pouplios' death, Anastasia returns to her religious activities. At some point she is arrested for being a Christian. She undergoes martyrdom and dies after being burnt.

Barbara is another martyr who was very popular in the Middle Ages. Her Greek legend, written in the sixth or seventh century, was also adapted into many medieval languages (Kazhdan and Patterson-Ševčenko 1991: 252). According to her legend, Barbara is the only daughter of a rich and noble man from Heliopolis, Dioskouros, who shuts her up in a tower so that no man can see her. She soon converts to Christianity and, while her father is away, orders a third window be installed in a room of the tower to symbolise the Holy Trinity. As soon as Dioskouros becomes aware of this, he tries to kill her, but she disappears miraculously. She is brought by a divine power to a mountain top where she is discovered by her father, who drags her off to martyrdom. She is finally killed by the sword of her own father, who is struck by lightning and dies immediately afterwards.

The Greek legend of Catherine of Alexandria dates from the sixth or the first half of the seventh century (Viteau 1897). The oldest document referring to Catherine's passion is to be found in a few lines of her lost acts in a fragmentary Greek martyrology from the first half of the eighth century (Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen 1993: 5). Catherine is supposed to have been martyred in Alexandria in the fourth century. There is no evidence that she ever existed except as a fictitious character (Delehay 1966: 182, 194). Catherine's legend was highly popular in the Middle Ages. The Greek original of her Life was adapted into Latin, Western vernacular and oriental languages (Kazhdan and Patterson-Ševčenko 1991a: 393).

Catherine, a beautiful virgin of imperial stock, challenges the emperor Maxentius over his sacrifices to pagan idols. She disputes with fifty philosophers, called in by Maxentius to convince her of the errors of Christianity, and manages to defeat and convert them. She also converts

the emperor's wife and the captain of his guard along with two hundred soldiers. She despises the marriage Maxentius offers her and undergoes many tortures, the most famous of which is the attempt to have her body broken on a turning wheel. Just in time an angel appears and takes Catherine away from the machine, which is turned against the spectators of her martyrdom and kills thousands of them.

Christina's legendary Passion has many parallels with that of Barbara. Like Barbara, Christina is the only daughter of a noble rich man from Tyre, called Urbanus, who encloses her in a tower so that she may not be seen by men. In the tower Christina worships Christ and fails to sacrifice to the pagan gods, whose golden and silver idols are placed in the tower by her father. At some point she smashes the idols and gives the gold and silver to the poor. When her father finds out, he tortures her. Since no tortures can kill her, her father decides to place her on a turning wheel under which a great fire is set. The fire burns many of the bystanders, while Christina's body remains untouched. She is then thrown into the sea. Christ appears and baptises her. Her father dies in agony on the same evening. Some time later, Dion, a new governor, comes to Tyre. Dion arrests Christina and inflicts on her new tortures which prove harmless to the heroine. Dion eventually dies but his successor makes Christina undergo a new trial by torture. Finally Christina is killed by the sword.

Febronia's Passion has survived in many languages, for example Syriac, Greek, Latin, Armenian and Georgian. Jean Simon (1924) believes that the original was written in Syriac (see also Beck 1959: 460; Brock and Ashbrook-Harvey 1987: 150–151; Brown 1988: 270). Simon argues that the people of Nisibis, from where the original derives, created the legend of Febronia to establish a Christian past which connected them with the mainstream dogmas of the official Orthodox Church and put them in opposition to the heresy of the monophysites (Simon 1924).

Febronia's life-story reads as follows: at the age of two, she enters a nunnery at Nisibis. Bryene, the abbess of the nunnery, brings her up very strictly, never allowing her to see any men. As she grows up, Febronia becomes a very beautiful and pious nun. While time passes peacefully in the nunnery of Bryene, the pagan emperor Diocletian, a great persecutor of Christians, sends his soldiers to Nisibis to arrest all the Christians of the area. Being informed about Diocletian's intentions, all the priests and their bishop followed by most of the nuns of Bryene's convent run away. Only Bryene, Thomaïs and Febronia, who is recovering

from a serious illness, stay behind. When Diocletian's soldiers arrive at the convent, they only arrest Febronia. She is led to martyrdom where she is killed after undergoing horrendous tortures.

The legend of Irene has similarities with those of Barbara and Christina. According to Irene's legend, there is an emperor called Licinius who has a daughter called Penelope distinguished for her extreme beauty. Penelope is shut up by her father in a tower until she reaches the age of marriage. In the tower she converts to Christianity and is baptised Irene by a priest who miraculously enters the tower. When Irene reaches the age of marriage, her father comes to the tower to let her out. He then discovers that she has become a Christian. He tries unsuccessfully to kill her, but is himself killed instead and resurrected by Irene. Realising the power of the Christian God, Licinius converts and decides to give up his throne. His successor tortures Irene without managing to kill her. He is finally sent away from Irene's city by the infuriated inhabitants who in the meantime have converted after witnessing the power of God manifested in Irene's miraculous body. The emperor is succeeded by his son, who also comes to Irene's city with the intention of killing her. Eventually he is killed by an angel. Irene is set free. She preaches the word of God and performs miracles until she is arrested by the new emperor. A new cycle of tortures begins, in which Irene is again assisted by an angel who kills the new emperor. Thirty days later a prefect arrives in the city. Irene has another trial during which the prefect is converted. Finally, the king of Persia sends seventy soldiers in order to arrest Irene. She is brought to Persia where she is killed by the Persian king. She is resurrected by an angel four days later. The king of Persia converts to Christianity. As soon as everybody has been baptised, Irene is miraculously brought to Ephesos where she preaches and performs miracles. When she is summoned by God, she encloses herself in a coffin from which her body disappears.

Lucy, another famous martyr, is supposed to have died in 304 (Farmer 1997: 311). According to her legend, Lucy, a Sicilian from Syracuse, is the only child of a noble and wealthy family. Her father dies while she is in infancy and she is brought up by her mother who betroths her to a pagan. Nevertheless, Lucy decides not to marry but to devote herself to God. As soon as Lucy's suitor is informed about her decision, he accuses her before the pagan governor of Syracuse for being a Christian. Lucy is brought before the governor and undergoes torture. In the end she is killed by decapitation.

Marina, who also was famous in the Middle Ages, is known in the West as Margaret (Larson 2002). Marina's legend reads as follows: she is born in Antioch, the daughter of a pagan priest. She converts to Christianity under the influence of her nanny. When the prefect Olybrios sees Marina, he is impressed by her extreme beauty and wants to marry her. Marina, having devoted her virginity to God, rejects his advances. He then tortures her in a very cruel way. Marina is finally decapitated.

The Passion of Paraskeve examined here was written by John of Euboea in the eighth century (Halkin 1966: 228). Paraskeve is the only child of a rich, noble and pious family. Her parents die when Paraskeve is twelve years old. She then distributes her fortune to the poor and leads an ascetic life. Due to her Christian way of life, she is brought before the governor who tortures her. The torture-machines do not affect her body and her torturer, witnessing such a miracle, converts. Then Paraskeve goes to another city in order to teach God's word. She is arrested a second time and brought before the governor. She undergoes new tortures and is finally killed by the sword.

Photeine is the Samaritan woman with whom Christ, according to the New Testament (Jn. 4.8–26), spoke at Jacob's well and to whom He revealed his divinity (Talbot 1994: 85). The Passion of Photeine was written after the sixth or even seventh century, but before the tenth century when her cult was established in Constantinople (Talbot and Kazhdan 1994: 105). Photeine, her sisters and her two sons are brought before the emperor Nero after he has been informed about their success in converting pagans to Christianity. They are violently tortured, but the tortures prove harmless. In the end they are flayed and Photeine's sons are executed. Photeine is brought back to prison where she miraculously acquires a new skin. She dies at a very old age, after preaching the word of God and converting many people to Christianity.

The story of Pistis, Elpis and Agape was written after the sixth century (Halkin 1973: 180). Pistis, Elpis and Agape are the three daughters of a woman called Sophia. According to the legend, the four noble women are arrested by the soldiers of the emperor Hadrian after he has been informed that they teach Christian doctrines to Roman women. Pistis, the oldest sister, is the first to undergo torture. She is killed by decapitation. The torture and death of Elpis follow on the next day and she also is decapitated. Agape, the youngest sister, is then summoned to mar-

tyrdom. Like her other two sisters she is finally killed by the sword. Their mother, Sophia, is neither tortured nor killed but dies after having buried her three daughters.

The legend of Tatiane is dated to the seventh century (Halkin 1973: 11). According to her legend, Tatiane is arrested by the soldiers of the pagan emperor Alexander while she is praying in a Roman church. She is brought before the emperor who is fascinated by her beauty. He asks Tatiane to enter the temple of Apollo to offer a sacrifice to the pagan gods. In the temple Tatiane prays to the Christian God. As soon as she ends her prayer, an earthquake takes place and both the statue of Apollo and a quarter of the temple are destroyed. Tatiane is then tortured. Unable to harm her, her executioners convert and are condemned to death. The cruel torture of Tatiane is continued by new executioners. Finally Tatiane is killed by the sword.

Thecla is supposed to have lived in the first century. Her legend, originating in the apocryphal acts of Paul, was known before the end of the second century and was very popular in Byzantium (Dagron 1978: 31–54). The Life of Thecla discussed here is an anonymous work of the fifth century, most probably produced in Seleukeia (Dagron 1978: 13–30). Thecla, a young woman of Ikonion, betrothed to the pagan Thamyris, spends all her time sitting at her window listening to Paul preaching about chastity. Her mother, Theocleia, gets worried about her daughter's insistence on staying by the window and sends for Thamyris. Unable to convince Thecla to leave the window, Thamyris arranges for Paul's arrest. Paul ends up in prison where he is secretly visited by Thecla who listens to his teachings. As soon as this becomes known to her mother and suitor, they inform the governor who commands Thecla's arrest. During Thecla's interrogation, her mother asks for her punishment. A fire is lit into which Thecla is thrown. The fire is miraculously extinguished and Thecla comes out of it untouched. She is set free and she follows Paul who travels to Antioch. There an influential man called Alexander falls in love with her. Thecla rejects his advances and when he tries to embrace her she tears off his garment. Alexander complains to the governor of the city who condemns Thecla to be thrown to wild beasts. The beasts do not harm her. When Thecla is released, she follows Paul whom she finds in the city of Myra. Paul asks her to preach the word of God. She returns to Ikonion where she converts her mother. Later she ends up in Seleukeia where she teaches Christianity and con-

verts many people. She does not die but disappears after entering the earth.

The following analysis is divided into two parts, "The Scene of Martyrdom" and "The Body as Text – The Text as Body", in which the theatrical elements of the heroines' martyrdoms and the hagiographers' emphasis on female chastity and corporeality will be examined. As this examination will reveal, the female martyrs, like their male counterparts, perform their bodily and spiritual power on the stage of martyrdom, whereas their pagan opponents perform their powerlessness. In fact, the texts discussed here are based on binary oppositions, one of which is that of good and evil: the good heroes or heroines versus the villains representing the good and evil sides of the world, its order and disorder. The belief in the existence of both good and evil powers and of one place (Heaven) reserved for the saved (good) people and another (Hell) reserved for the damned (bad) people was part of the Byzantines' conception of the world (Agapitos 2004: 107–108; Patlagean 1992: 633), and was incorporated in their literature and especially in hagiography.

The Scene of Martyrdom

CREATING THE SCENE

After their capture by pagan soldiers, the martyrs are brought before the prefect who undertakes to organise their public trials. In order to secure the presence of a big audience during the martyrs' trials, many pagan prefects invite as many people as possible to attend. In Febronia's Passion, for instance, the prefect Selenos orders his heralds to inform all the inhabitants of his town that Febronia's trial of martyrdom will take place on the following day (*PFeb* ch.17).

In the texts examined here, the physical location of martyrdom is very often amplified to such a large scale that it hosts thousands of people. This is shown through statements made by the hagiographer who observes, for example, that during the martyrdom thousands of spectators were converted to Christianity. "The people who were converted [...] were thirty-nine thousand" (οἱ δὲ πεισθέντες [...] ἦσαν τριάκοντα καὶ ἑννέα χιλιάδες, *PIr* p.137.687–688), states the author of Irene's legend.

In some texts, the audience even takes part in the arrangement of the scene of martyrdom and thus transgresses its original role as view-

er of the heroine's martyrdom. Such active participation in the realisation of martyrdom undertaken by the members of the audience is an attempt on their part to take a form of control over the punished heroine. At the same time this participation aims to prove the audience's political position; it is on the right side of the law. In addition, it confirms the torturer's legal power and control over the guilty heroine who has broken the religious principles of her pagan society.

In Thecla's Life, for instance, the heroine's fellow citizens bring fuel for the fire into which her body is eventually to be thrown (*VThec* ch.12.33). This act indicates the hostility of the community towards Thecla because she dares to be "different" and does not want to marry, as is the custom, but to follow a stranger, Paul, who proclaims that virginity is the highest human virtue (*VThec* ch.2.17–22). On the other hand, by committing this act, the audience undertakes a role in the scene of martyrdom; it shares the role of the torturer, the proconsul Kestillios.

There are texts in which the internal audience is moved by and feels compassion for the heroine after seeing how brutal the torturer is and thus tries to prevent his cruel acts. This is, once again, an attempt on the part of the audience to control the situation of martyrdom which, in this case, is out of control. The torturer exceeds the limits of violence that the spectators can accept. The audience of Febronia's martyrdom is a case in point. When Selenos, Febronia's torturer, orders that her breasts be cut off, the audience reacts: "The crowds gave a groan and they supplicated the judge with the words, 'My lord judge, we beseech you, let the girl be spared of this torture' " (tr. Brock and Ashbrook-Harvey 1987: 168; οἱ ὄχλοι ἐβόων παρακαλοῦντες τὸν δικαστὴν καὶ λέγοντες "δεόμεθά σου κύριε συγχωρηθεῖν τῇ νέᾳ ἢ τιμωρίᾳ αὐτῇ". *PFeb* ch.27). Despite the audience's apparent displeasure towards Selenos' violence, Selenos in the end has Febronia's breasts cut off, reasserting his own decisive power over and above that of the audience.

Being inspired by the martyrs' courage and the miracles manifested over their bodies which, despite the cruel tortures remain untouched, many members of the martyrs' audience are converted to Christianity. These individuals are immediately punished and are thus forced to exchange their role as viewers. Instead of *viewing* they are then *viewed* while being punished. They lose the position they had as members of the audience. The barriers that exist between the martyr and her audience, the stage of martyrdom and the place reserved for the spectators,

are abolished through the converted spectators, who come to the stage and undertake the martyr's role. In this case, identity is associated with location. The Christians are on the stage, whereas the pagans are below, in front of or around it. A movement is possible only from the pagans' side; they can move to the stage, and thus become Christian martyrs but the Christian martyrs never leave the stage.

The forms of torment imposed on the audience are gender-based. The usual punishments inflicted on converted male spectators are burning, exposure to wild animals or decapitation. An example of the punishment of burning is illustrated in Catherine's Passion where the converted philosophers, whom she defeats in a philosophical *agon*, are put into the fire (*PAec* ch.12–13). Porphyryon, the chief of the emperor's military staff, is decapitated in the same text (*PAec* ch.22). In contrast to the central heroines and some of their female followers who belong to the audience, there is no repetition of tortures in the case of the converted male spectators because they die during the first torture inflicted upon them.

Unlike the male members of the audience, because of their gender, some of the converted female spectators are perceived as second personifications of the female protagonist. They are therefore made to undergo the same tortures as the female protagonists, which very often are sexually charged. Parts of the heroines' bodies, characteristic of female sexuality, are violated. A pious woman, Iouliane, a member of the audience during Barbara's martyrdom and already a Christian, starts crying upon seeing the acts of violence performed on Barbara's body. Her emotional reaction does not remain unnoticed. Recognised as a Christian, she is seized by the prefect's servants (*PBar* p.95). The tortures that are inflicted upon her repeat and re-enact those of Barbara. The double tortures of the two women are realised simultaneously. Thus Iouliane becomes a second Barbara; she is hung up naked and while hanging her body is flayed and at the same time parts of it are burnt by fire (*PBar* p.95). Prior to being put into prison, her breasts and those of Barbara are simultaneously cut off (*PBar* p.97). In the end both Barbara and Iouliane are decapitated (*PBar* p.99).

As stated earlier, the theatrical form of martyrdom in the legends of martyrs is achieved mainly through the presence of a performer (martyr) and an audience, as well as through the dramatic elements of the narratives. Dramatic dialogue, for instance, is an important feature of martyrs' legends, as indicated by this extract from the Passion of Agape,

Irene and Chione, when the prefect interrogates Irene:

"Last year," said the prefect, "when this edict of our lords the emperors and Caesars was first promulgated, where did you hide?"

"Wherever God willed," said Irene. "We lived on the mountains, in the open air, as God is my witness."

"Whom were you living with?" asked the prefect.

Irene answered: "We lived out of doors in different places among the mountains."

The prefect said: "Who supplied you with bread?"

Irene answered: "God who supplies all men."

"Was your father aware of this?" asked the prefect.

Irene answered: "I swear by almighty God, he was not aware; he knew nothing at all about it."

"Were any of your neighbours aware of this?" asked the prefect.

Irene answered: "Go and question our neighbours, and inquire about the area to see whether anyone knew where we were." (tr. Musurillo 1972: 289)

ὁ ἡγεμὼν εἶπεν· Τῷ περυσινῷ ἔτει, ἡνίκα ἡ τηλικαύτη κέλευσις αὐτῶν τῶν δεσποτῶν ἡμῶν τῶν βασιλέων καὶ Καيسάρων πρῶτως ἐφοίτησεν, ποῦ ἀπεκρύφθητε;

Εἰρήνη εἶπεν· Ὅπου ἂν ὁ Θεὸς ἠθέλησεν, ἐν ὄρεσι, βλέπει ὁ Θεός, ὕπαιθροι.

ὁ ἡγεμὼν εἶπεν· Παρὰ τίνι ἐγένεσθε;

Εἰρήνη εἶπεν· Ὑπαιθροὶ ἐν ἄλλοις καὶ ἄλλοις ὄρεσιν.

ὁ ἡγεμὼν εἶπεν· Τίνες ἦσαν οἱ τὸν ἄρτον ὑμῖν παρέχοντες;

Εἰρήνη εἶπεν· Ὁ Θεὸς ὁ πᾶσι παρέχων.

ὁ ἡγεμὼν εἶπεν· Συνέγνω ὑμῖν ὁ πατήρ ὁ ὑμέτερος;

Εἰρήνη εἶπεν· Μὰ τὸν παντοκράτορα Θεόν, οὐ συνέγνω οὔτε ἔγνω ὅλως.

ὁ ἡγεμὼν εἶπεν· Τίς τῶν γειτόνων ὑμῖν συνήδει;

Εἰρήνη εἶπεν· Ἐπερώτα τοὺς γείτονας καὶ τοὺς τόπους, εἴ τις ἔγνω ὅπου ἡμεῖς ἦμεν. (*PAGIrCh* ch.5.17–26)

One of the two participants of the interrogation has to undertake the roles of the judge and the torturer, whereas the second one undertakes that of the defender of the Christian faith and the tortured. In most cases during the interrogation the martyr stands on a platform (βῆμα) which functions as a small stage that makes her visible to spectators, and at the same time stresses her role as the one who is under interrogation and subsequently the one whose life is literally at stake. Everything that is going to happen to the heroine will be witnessed by the audience. Her fate is inextricably linked with the progress and duration of the trial scene. The

trial is an alteration of interrogation and bodily tortures. At the beginning, the interrogator tries to convince the heroine to make a sacrifice to the pagan gods and, in addition, to marry him. Since this first attempt is unsuccessful, he verbalises his intention to torture her. She still does not change her mind and her first torture begins. During or after the torture the tormenter interrogates her again, trying desperately to make her follow his instructions and sacrifice to his gods. Since the body of the martyr cannot be harmed during the first torture, the trial takes an unexpected turn for the pagan torturer and his audience, who had expected that this torture would be severe enough to harm or to kill her. One torture follows another, indicating the torturer's desire to destroy a body that cannot be destroyed, and the trial continues. The internal audience as well as the actual reader or listener of the text attend the whole progress of the trial, which appears to be a play with a beginning, a middle and an end.⁴

THE FEMALE MARTYR'S BODY UNDER SEXUAL VIOLENCE

In the Passion of Marina of Antioch appears the following scene:

And the next day in the presence of all the people, Olybrios after sitting on the bema gave orders for the holy maiden to be brought before him. As she entered, his heart wavered at the sight of her beauty, and he said to her: "Let the gods know that I pity your youth. Take my advice and sacrifice to the gods, and I will offer you lots of money." [...] And Marina said: "[...] You cannot convince me, even if you endanger my chastity [...]." Olybrios, the prefect said: "You will fall into affliction and horrendous tortures, and your tender limbs will be cut up by the sword, and the fire of my anger will waste you away. But if you accept my advice and sacrifice to the gods your tender body will be desirable to me and I will admit in the presence of everybody that you will be the relief of my soul, and I will take you as my wife because of your beauty, and you will be set free from the wrath of my anger." [...] Then Olybrios ordered that she be stripped naked, placed on a bench and beaten with switches. After stretching her out on the bench, the carnivorous executioners set about torturing her. The holy woman could not feel any pain. She gazed towards heaven, and said: "My Lord, I have put my trust in you [...]." In truth, the holy woman was very tender, and her body was severely cut up by the switches, and a lot of

blood flowed out of her. [...] Then she turned to the prefect and said: "Do whatever you want [with my body], and whatever is pleasing to your eyes." [...] The carnivorous executioners flayed her ribs. [...] And all the bystanders were amazed at seeing her body being destroyed.

καὶ τῇ ἐξῆς παρόντος παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ καθεσθεὶς ἐπὶ τοῦ θήματος ἐκέλευ-
σεν εἰσαχθῆναι τὴν ἁγίαν κόρην. εἰσελθούσης δὲ αὐτῆς θεασάμενος αὐτῆς
τὸ κάλλος ὠλιγοψύχησεν αὐτοῦ ἡ καρδιά, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· Γινωσκέτωσαν οἱ
θεοί, ὅτι ἐλεῶ τὸ νέον τῆς ἡλικίας σου· ὁδὸν πείσθητί μοι καὶ θύσον τοῖς
θεοῖς, καὶ πολλὰ χρήματα παρέξομαί σοι. [...] Καὶ εἶπεν Μαρίνα· [...] οὐ
δύνασαι με πείσαι, καὶ οὐκ ἂν παρασαλεύσας μου τὴν ἀγνεΐαν [...] Ὀλύ-
βριος ἑπαρχος εἶπεν· Εἰς πολλὴν θλίψιν περιπεσεῖν ἔχεις καὶ εἰς φοβερὰ κολα-
στήρια, καὶ τὰ μέλη σου ἐκεῖνα τὰ τρυφερὰ κατακοπήσονται ὑπὸ σιδήρου καὶ
τὸ πῦρ τοῦ θυμοῦ μου μαραινέει σε· ἐὰν δὲ πεισθῇς μοι καὶ θύσης τοῖς θεοῖς,
τὸ σῶμά σου ἐκεῖνο τὸ τρυφερὸν ἔσται μοι ποθεινόν, καὶ παρόντων πάντων
ὁμολογήσω σε ὅτι ἔσῃ ἀνάπαυσις τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ λαμβάνω σε ἑμαυτῷ
εἰς γυναῖκα διὰ τὸ κάλλος σου, καὶ ἐλευθερωθήσῃ ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θυμοῦ
μου. [...] Τότε προσέταξεν Ὀλύβριος ἀποδυθῆναι αὐτὴν καὶ τεθῆναι ἐπὶ σκα-
μνῷ καὶ ῥάβδοις αὐτὴν τύπτεσθαι. τείναντες οὖν αὐτὴν οἱ σαρκοβόροι ἐπὶ
τοῦ σκάμνου ἐβασάνιζον. ἡ δὲ ἁγία ὅλως οὐκ ἠσθάνετο τῶν βασάνων, ἀλλ'
εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀτενίσασα ἔλεγεν· Ἐπὶ σοί, κύριε, ἤλπισα [...] ἐπ' ἀληθεί-
ας δὲ ἦν ἡ ἁγία τρυφερὰ σφόδρα, καὶ πάνυ κατεκόπτετο τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς
ἐπὶ τῶν ῥάβδων καὶ πολὺ αἷμα ἔρρει ἀπ' αὐτῆς. [...] Τότε ἀποστραφεῖσα
τῷ ἐπάρχῳ λέγει· Ποίει ὃ θέλεις καὶ εἴ τι δᾶν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς σου ἀρεστὸν
ἔσται. [...] οἱ δὲ σαρκοβόροι [δῆμιοι] ἔξεον τὰς πλευρὰς αὐτῆς. [...] καὶ πάντες
οἱ ἐκεῖσε ἑστῶτες ἐθαύμαζον ὁρῶντες τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς διαφθειρόμενον.
(*PMarAnt* p.19.14–20 and 22–23, p.20.27–36, p.21.13–18 and 27–30,
p.22.5–7, p.23.23–24 and 26–27)

In the above scene Marina is brought before the prefect Olybrios who asks her in public to marry him. In fact, Olybrios' love for Marina is the reason for her capture, not her Christian identity as is the case with most martyrs. One day Olybrios sees by chance the beautiful Marina while she tends her sheep and falls in love with her. He declares that he will take her as either his wife if she is a free woman or as his concubine if she is a servant. He then orders her arrest and imprisonment, so that she can be reserved for him. To his great disappointment, Olybrios is informed that Marina is not willing to marry him because she has devoted her virginity to Christ, whom she considers her spiritual spouse. It is at this point that Olybrios becomes aware of Marina's Christian faith which he uses as the pretext for her public trial and punishment. Thus

⁴ It should be added that these, of course, also are characteristics of a male martyr legend.

Marina's resistance to Olybrios' sexual advances comes to be equated with her rejection of idolatry.

In Marina's first public trial, which is depicted in the scene quoted above, Olybrios tests first Marina's faith by asking her to sacrifice to pagan gods and offering her money in return. She refuses and then Olybrios reveals in public his desire for her tender young body and his intention to marry her. He also states his determination to cut her lovely body into pieces if she disobeys. Marina rejects Olybrios' advances and as a result he carries out his threats.

The tortures that follow reveal a sexually unsatisfied torturer rather than a pagan who fights against Christianity. Marina's sexually charged tortures show that she is punished more because she denies the marriage Olybrios offers her and less because of her Christian faith. Olybrios orders that Marina be stripped naked before all the people of Antioch. Following Olybrios' orders, his servants deprive Marina of her clothes, place her on a stool and start whipping her.

Being unable to win Marina's virgin body for himself through marriage, Olybrios takes pleasure in it by its public display and punishment. Marina appears to discern Olybrios' voyeuristic intentions, as she says to him that he may do whatever he wants with her body and whatever is pleasing to his eyes. Marina's tortures seem to provide not only Olybrios but also the people of Antioch with a certain sadistic enjoyment of sexual dimensions. Marina's fellow citizens do not criticise Olybrios for the violent tortures he imposes on Marina, as the spectators of Febronia's sexually charged tortures do, but remain silent and gaze with admiration at Marina's naked and bloody body. As the verb ἐθαύμαζον suggests, the bystanders are both surprised and amazed at seeing the young fifteen-year-old virgin body of Marina being tortured.

Marina's body becomes the passive object of the spectators' voyeuristic and sadistic impulses. At the time of her torture Marina exists only as a desired object of their gaze providing entertainment and pleasure. She is looked at and displayed as a sexual object. Her body is controlled and possessed by her spectators through the medium of sight. Marina does not look at her viewers, she does not react to the fact that she is being seen. She looks towards heaven instead and prays to God. Marina is not ashamed of being viewed naked and tortured because she is not interested in the very fact that she is being seen. From her perspective the maltreatment of her body will not affect her soul which is

already devoted to Christ who protects it (*PMarAnt* p.20.1–4).

As the example of Marina demonstrates, the body of the martyr is treated as an object upon which sadistic actions can be performed. It is less a target of penal than of sexual repression. The heroines' clothes are removed theatrically and then the violation of their bodies begins. However the satisfaction of the torturer's and the audience's voyeuristic intentions is not possible in all texts. In contrast to Marina, who is the passive object of the spectators' gaze, there are heroines whose naked bodies the audience is prevented from seeing through God's intervention.

As soon as Thecla's naked body is put into the fire, the fire immediately flares up to form a wall which prevents the "immodest" (ἀκόλαστοι, *VThec* ch.12.61) viewers, who dare to watch her, from seeing her body (*VThec* ch.12.57–62). The audience is suddenly deprived of its role as a spectator. The members of Thecla's audience cannot be active in the way that the spectators of Marina of Antioch are because they are unable to control their own gaze, which would enable them to possess the heroine's body visually. Instead, the spectators' gaze is regulated by the fire. They see what the fire allows them to watch. Not only are the spectators' expectations left unrealised, inasmuch as they are prevented from seeing the virgin body of Thecla naked, but they are also punished because of their desire to see it, when a strong hail storm kills many of them and puts the fire out. The audience is here transformed into a passive victim, whereas the female body does not become the object of the spectators' gaze. These are the same spectators mentioned above (p. 31) who collect fuel for the fire that is supposed to burn Thecla. They attempt to exercise power over her in two ways: through the instrument of torture and through their gaze. Neither way is successful. On the contrary, both bring about the spectators' own destruction.

Another martyr whose virgin body is not seen naked by others, despite her torturer's attempts, is Agnes. Agnes' torturer attempts to deprive her of her clothes with the aim of having her taken naked to a brothel to be offered to its male customers. As soon as Agnes' clothes are removed, her body reacts in a spectacular way: her hair suddenly becomes thick and covers her body better than any clothing. Furthermore, when she enters the brothel a blinding light covers her, further preventing the brothel's customers from seeing her and approaching her (*PAgn* ch.8).

Agnes, at this point in the narrative, is forced to undertake the role of a prostitute. Her body, however, is a special commodity since, unlike the

bodies of the prostitutes, it has never been seen or touched by a man. During her exposure Agnes as viewed object and viewing subject could share a passive and an active role with her spectators, who would equally gaze at her and be gazed at by her. Yet what actually happens is something completely different. The male customers do not experience the performance they are prepared for. The strong light that blinds them prevents them from controlling their own gaze. They are unable to see what they desire to watch. The more the audience tries to see, the more it is blinded by the light (ὅσω τις θυμωδῶς ὀφθαλμοῖς θεάσασθαι ἤθελεν, τοσοῦτον τῆς ὁράσεως ἀμβλυπίαν ὑπέμεινε. *Pagn* ch.8).

Agnes does not exist for the spectators in this moment because she is not an object of their gaze. Unlike these male spectators, Agnes is not deprived of her ability to see. She witnesses a vision which at the same time is experienced by the actual reader or listener of the text through the words of the hagiographer. Christ appears in front of Agnes holding a white garment which he offers to her in order to hide her naked body (*Pagn* ch.8). This is the third time that the heroine's body is disguised so that its femininity cannot be seen by the lustful male gaze. When Christ disappears, the whole scene is transformed; "the place of prostitution becomes a place for prayer" (ὁ τῆς πορνείας τόπος γίνεται προσευχῆς. *Pagn* ch.9). An "impure" place such as the brothel acquires, through Agnes' hidden virgin body and Christ's appearance, the holiness of a church. The men who go into the brothel with the intention of indulging in paid intercourse, worship the heroine instead and immediately afterwards leave the place. Agnes becomes holy because her body remains virginal despite being in a brothel. Her name 'Αγνή is synonymous with her bodily purity.

THE POWER OF THE MARTYR'S BODY

Martyr legends present a diametrical opposition between Christians and pagans and their struggle for predominance. The antagonism between Christians and pagans is the kernel around which the narratives of martyrs develop. The martyrs verbalise their resolution to fight through martyrdom against the devil, who is represented by the pagan torturers. Strengthened by divine power, the martyrs firmly believe that they will defeat the evil powers set against them. On the other hand the pagan torturers, supported by their political power and their right to punish, appear at the beginning and in some cases until the

very end of the narration to believe that they will subdue the Christians, who they see as the defenceless victims of their power. In Irene's *Passion*, for example, the prefect Babdos says to Irene: "You know, woman, that I have been given power against you" (Οἶδας, ὦ γύναι, ὅτι ἐξουσία μοι ἐδόθη κατὰ σοῦ. *PIr* p.144.925).

Both Christians and pagans consider themselves powerful, whereas they see their opponents as powerless and therefore inferior. Each group attempts to win the other over. According to the Christians, the pagans should convert to Christianity in order to save themselves from the punishment inflicted upon them by the Christian God, as formulated, for example, by Agnes during her interrogation. She says to the prefect:

You yourself and the people like you [the pagans], if you do not give up worshipping them [the pagan gods] you will be punished like them. For just as they were fashioned by fire, the people who worship them will be handed over to an eternal burning, not in order to be fashioned, but so that they may feel shame and perish.

σὺ δὲ αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ ὅμοιοί σου, ἢν μὴ τὸ σέβας τούτων ἀρνήσησθε, ὁμοία αὐτῶν κόλασις ὑμᾶς συγκλείσει· καθὼς γὰρ ἐκεῖνοι πυρὶ διεπλάσθησαν, οὕτως οἱ σεβόμενοι αὐτοὺς αἰωνίῳ ἐμπυρισμῷ παραδοθήσονται, οὐχ ἵνα πλασθῶσιν, ἀλλ' ἵνα ἐντραπῶσιν καὶ ἀπόλωνται. (*Pagn* ch.7)

The pagan prefects or emperors, on the other hand, try to convert the Christians to the pagan religion. The means with which the pagan torturers attempt to convince martyrs to renounce Christianity are their instruments of torture and the fear that these may create in the martyrs' souls. They aim to present their instruments of torture in as horrifying a way as possible so that the effect of the terror upon the martyrs proves greater. In addition, the more frightening their machines of torture look, the greater they think their power appears:

Listen, emperor, and do what I say—otherwise you will not manage to convince her—so that after seeing [the instruments of torture], she will be persuaded by fear, and will sacrifice to the gods [...] Let four wheels be made; let each wheel be studded with some three hundred sharp nails and saws; and let her sit beside the wheel and [...] let the wheels be turned in such a way that they make a great roaring noise; she, having seen these, will sacrifice [to the gods].

Ἄκουε, βασιλεῦ, καὶ ὃ λέγω σοι τοῦτο ποιήσον, —ἄλλως γὰρ οὐ δύνῃ πείσαι αὐτήν, —ἵνα ἰδοῦσα πεισθῇ ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου καὶ θύσῃ τοῖς θεοῖς [...] Γενέ-

σθωσαν τροχοὶ τέσσαρες· κατὰ δὲ τροχὸν ἐμπαγήτωσαν ἥλοι ὀξεῖς καὶ πριστήρες ὡς τριακόσιοι καὶ καθεσθήτω αὐτὴ πλησίον τοῦ τροχοῦ καὶ [...] στρεφόμεσθωσαν οἱ τροχοί, ὥστε βρυγμὸν μέγαν γενέσθαι, ἵνα ταῦτα ἰδοῦσα θύσῃ. (PAec ch.19)

Such life-threatening machines as the one described here, constructed by the emperor Maxentius on the advice of one of his men in order to scare and kill Catherine, appear unable to kill the martyrs. They achieve none of the purposes for which they were constructed. Neither do they frighten the martyrs and make them sacrifice to the gods, nor do they kill them. The reason for this is that the martyrs possess a “sublime body”. The term “sublime body” is employed by Sarah Kay (Kay 2000) to describe the martyr’s body, which does not die even though it is burnt and cut into pieces. The fact that the martyr’s body transgresses its physicality and does not die despite the horrendous tortures inflicted upon it, leads to the prolongation and alteration of the tortures. The longer the body remains unharmed, the larger the tormenter’s desire to harm it.

In the martyrs’ legends discussed in this study, the female body either remains untouched during some of the tortures or is triumphantly reconstituted after them. It is characterised by a constant change; it changes form and appearance. The martyr’s body is the means through which both the torturer and God alike manifest their power: the torturer cuts it into pieces and God puts these pieces back together, making the body whole once more.

Pistis’ body, for instance, is not marked at all, even though she is beaten by twelve different centurions; δεκαδύο οὖν κεντυριῶνων ἀλλαγέντων ἐπὶ τῇ μακαρίᾳ κόρῃ, οὐκ ἦν σπίλος ἢ ἴχνος ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτῆς πληγῆς (PPisElAg ch.7). When the pagan tormenters face such bodily resistance, their first reaction is anger. Their anger is expressed in further tortures that aim to mark and alter the heroine’s body. Hadrian, Pistis’ torturer, after realising that the hard beating by twelve different men cannot touch her body, orders her breasts to be cut off by a sword. Her breasts are indeed cut off and therefore Hadrian manages to change the form of her body. In Photeine’s Passion, three executioners try seven times to cut Photeine’s hands. In the end they are punished because they attempt to punish her; they die, while nothing happens to her.

He ordered that their [Photeine’s, her sons’ and her sisters’] holy hands be

cut off with an axe. When the axe was brought, he used it firstly to cut the martyr’s hands, and there was a novel thing to see: her hands, as if made of steel, were not touched at all by the iron. Even though the three executioners brought down the axe from above against them seven times, they visibly suffered no harm, and the executioners were enfeebled and fell on the ground as if dead, whereas she remained unharmed.

Πελέκει κελεύει τὰς ὁσίας τούτων χεῖρας διακοπῆναι. ἀχθέντος τοιγαροῦν πελέκεως κατὰ τῶν τῆς μάρτυρος πρώτον χειρῶν τοῦτον κατήνεγκεν, καὶ ἦν ἰδεῖν πρᾶγμα καίνον· ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐξ ἀδάμαντος αὐτῇ τῶν χειρῶν συμπεπηγότων οὐδ’ ὅλως ἤπτετο τούτων ὁ σίδηρος, ἀλλὰ τῶν τριῶν δημίῳ ἀνὰ ἐπιτάκις ἀφ’ ὑψηλοῦ κατ’ αὐτῶν καταφερόντων τὸν πέλεκυν οὐδὲν ὠρώντο πάσχοντες ἐναντίον· καὶ οἱ μὲν δῆμιοι ἐκλυθέντες ὥσει νεκροὶ πρὸς τὴν γῆν ἐπιπτον, ἡ δὲ διέμενεν ἀβλαβής. (PPh ch.24.6–13)

As they witness that their power is in fact powerless and that none of their machines of torture is effective, the torturers become anxious. The fear that they intend to inflict upon the martyrs begins to grow in their own souls. Their first reaction is to try to torture the martyrs again in an attempt to regain their power. Thus they begin thinking of other means of killing the heroines. Some of them, having already applied all possible methods without success, ask their servants to provide them with new murderous ideas. Others suffer from being unable to kill the heroines because this is a sign of their loss of control over them and effectively a failure to exercise power. Paschasios, for instance, Lucy’s torturer, “the fool, was suffering in his soul through overwhelming thoughts, considering what kind of punishment could kill the virgin” (Ἐδασανίζετο οὖν τῇ ψυχῇ ὁ ἄφρων διὰ τῶν λογισμῶν ἐνθυμούμενος ὁποῖα τιμωρία ἀπολέσει τὴν παρθένον. PLuc ch.8.162–163). Others, unable to face their loss of power, pass the martyr on to other torturers.

Another blow to the pagan torturer’s power and authority is the conversion to Christianity of his own people and members of his family. The emperor Maxentius in Catherine’s Passion goes mad when his own wife and the commander of his army, Porphyrius, along with the whole army convert to Christianity. When Maxentius is informed about the conversion of the army and the army’s commander, he exclaims; “Alas! Porphyrius was my whole strength” (Ὁυαί μοι! Πορφυρίων γὰρ μου ἦν ὅλη ἡ δύναμις. PAec ch.22). The martyr’s power proves in these cases to be great and this is the martyr’s main attack against her pagan opponent: the destruction of the pagan’s power from within by taking

away all the people that are important to him, leaving him completely alone.

The torturers' agony and fear are prolonged when their machines of torture not only leave the martyrs' bodies untouched but also are used against the torturers themselves and their people by Christ and his servants, the angels, who come down to earth for this purpose. A complete reversal of roles takes place, in which the earthly form of punishment is reflected in the heavenly punishment. God becomes the torturer of the earthly torturer, the angels take the place of the earthly torturer's pagan servants and the martyr, instead of being punished, is saved.

The pagans' bodies, due to their physical nature, are dismembered and completely destroyed through the torture imposed on them by God and His servants. Eventually, the pagans suffer a very cruel death. Some of the characteristics that frame the pagans' "bad" deaths are their abnormality and suddenness.⁵ These are opposed to the martyrs' deaths which come at the right moment: when God decides that the martyrs have fulfilled their mission on earth, which is to promulgate the Christian truth and convert many people to Christianity through their trials of martyrdom. The martyrs are prepared for their death and know at which point this will take place, since they have the ability to see the future. Unlike the pagans, the martyrs desire their death because it will bring them closer to Christ, their spouse.

In the texts discussed here, the pagan torturers who are made to suffer by God can be divided into those who are punished in public and those who are punished in private.⁶ Their public punishments demonstrate God's power and function as forms of warning for the spectators who are still pagans: they should immediately convert to Christianity; otherwise they risk the same danger of being punished by God. The pagan torturers' attempts to manifest their own power through the Christians' public punishments prove unsuccessful. What they in the end manifest is their weakness. Their authority is mocked and turned into shame, whereas the martyrs, possessing a sublime nature displayed to the spectators of their martyrdoms, acquire political power. Their victim-

⁵ For the "bad" death of the villain heroes and the "good" death of the good heroes in Byzantine texts, see Agapitos 1998a, 2001 and 2003.

⁶ Not all the pagan torturers depicted in these legends are punished within the plot of the texts, but their eternal punishment after their physical death is implied or predicted by the heroines.

isation is inverted into glory and sanctification.

The torturers who are punished by death in private, unlike the martyrs whose death is always witnessed by people, are depicted as figures who die alone in a horrible way. Their death is presented as sudden and monstrous, as indicated by the example of Hadrian's end in the Passion of Pistis, Elpis and Agape:

The pupils of his eyes lost their ability to see and his legs were ruined by worms and his flesh came off his bones and you could see how his whole body fitted together and the joints of his hands were paralysed; out of his mouth came a liquid discharge along with worms, and he was totally destroyed.

αἱ γὰρ κόραι τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ ἡμβλύνθησαν καὶ τὰ σκέλη αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ σκωλήκων ἀνηλώθησαν καὶ αἱ σάρκες αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀστέων ἐξέρρευσαν καὶ ἡ οἰκονομία τῆς σωματικῆς πλάσεως ἐπεδείκνυτο καὶ αἱ χεῖρες αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν ἀρμονιῶν παρελύθησαν, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἰχώρες μετὰ σκωλήκων ἐφέροντο· καὶ ἦν ὅλος ἡφανισμένος. (PPisElAg ch.14)

Hadrian's body is completely deformed: it is separated into parts and its decomposition begins, a fact which turns it into an object of consumption, since it constitutes food for worms. Hadrian's body will disappear. It can no longer exist as an independent and complete substance because it first falls into pieces and the pieces then become part of a number of animals' bodies. The absorption of Hadrian's body by other bodies places it among lower forms of life, such as worms, and equates it with them; he is mutated into worms and thus loses his autonomy and human identity. His spiritual essence disappears by the eating away of his body. His soul and his self are lost through the loss of his body.

In the legends of martyrs, a person's soul and body appear to form a unity. The state of one's soul is reflected in the condition of one's body; the quality of one's soul determines that of one's body and the state of one's body, in turn, is the indicator of the essence of one's soul. The martyrs' bodily tortures elevate the body's physicality into a means of access to the divine. The indestructible or sublime bodies of the martyrs mirror their undestroyed souls; their unharmed bodies function as powerful signs of the integrity and wholeness of their souls which triumph over dismemberment and death.

...they [Agape and Chione] gave up their souls without having their garments damaged by smoke. God wanted to show the unfaithful that the fire

did not harm them but that he had chosen their triumphant souls in spotless bodies, so after the fire was put out, the bodies of the holy ones were found to be spotless, with not even the borders of their garments, nor even a single hair of their [heads] being damaged.

...δεδώκασι τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν, μὴδὲ καπνῷ στυφθέντων τῶν ἐσθμημάτων αὐτῶν. "Ἰνα δὲ δείξῃ ὁ Θεὸς τοῖς ἀπίστοις ὅτι τὸ πῦρ αὐτὰς οὐκ ἔβλαπεν ἀλλ' ἀμιάνοις τοῖς σώμασιν τὰς καλλινίκους αὐτῶν ψυχὰς ἐξελέξατο, μετὰ τὸ σθεσθῆναι τὴν πυρὰν ἡρέθη τὰ σώματα τῶν ἁγίων ἀμίαντα, μὴδὲ κρασπέδου μὴδὲ μὴν τριχὸς αὐτῶν ἀπολομένης. (*PAnastRom* ch.16)⁷

The pagans' bodies, on the other hand, which are fragmented, become the images of evil and pain and also the signs of their powerless souls. Thus two types of souls are demonstrated in the texts depicting martyrdoms: the "powerful" and the "powerless" soul. The one kind of soul can be called "powerful" and the other "powerless" according to the value with which each imbues the body in which it resides. The powerful soul inhabits a chaste, resistant and indestructible body, whereas the powerless one inhabits a lustful, vulnerable and perishable body. What basically differentiates these two kinds of bodies from each other is the possession or the lack of power. The ability of the one body to transcend its physicality is a sign of its power over nature and of its superiority over the other type of body which is distinguished by its physicality, namely its subjection to physical law. The one body is powerful because it is free; it is not subordinated to any external earthly power, physical or political. The other body is subject to earthly power and thus is the antithesis of the powerful one; a powerless body.

The martyrs who possess the powerful soul and body make a distinction between body and soul. For them the body and the soul do not form a unity. They are two separate substances, a physical body and a metaphysical soul. The one—the soul—is of importance because it is eternal, whereas the body, being temporary, has no meaning. In fact, the martyrs' renunciation of the body is what strengthens their souls and this strength of their souls, in turn, is extended to their bodies which become sublime: the martyrs do not feel pain and their bodies remain intact under torture. Even if the martyr's body is indeed fragmented by the tortures,

⁷ The Passion of Anastasia of Rome includes subplots of the tortures of other martyrs. One of these subplots refers to the martyrdom of the sisters Agape, Irene and Chione who are venerated also in an independent Passion, as mentioned earlier (p. 24).

as happens with Febronia's body, which is cut into pieces (even her teeth are taken out),⁸ or if the heroine is decapitated, all her bodily parts are gathered and put together by her Christian companions who afterwards bury them. The reconstruction of the dismembered body and the burial of the complete body function as a metaphor of the whole soul.

The pagans, however, whose soul is powerless, are not prepared to abstain from a pleasant bodily life. Unlike the martyrs, the pagans appear to pay more attention to the body than to the soul. In fact, they are presented by the hagiographers as not having any spiritual life but only a corporeal one. The importance that the pagans attribute to their body weakens their soul, the vulnerability of which, in turn, is extended to their body. Their powerless soul frames a body which is the product of sin and therefore doomed to the eternal death of Hell. The pagans' powerless soul is flesh, which as such is condemned to destruction and extinction, as the examples of the pagan torturers who are punished by God indicate.

Besides the unconverted pagan torturers, there also appear torturers who admit the defeat of their "power" and convert to Christianity. Their conversion, which saves them from God's punishment of both body and soul, constitutes the heroines' most important victory. The heroines manage to transform the most fanatical opponents and persecutors of Christianity into Christians, who now change from pagan rulers into slaves of God and worshippers of the holy heroines. Such an example is the Persian king Savor from Irene's Passion:

The king was informed that the martyr had risen from the dead, and he was greatly shaken. He asked again for the blessed woman to come before him, and after falling at her feet, he begged her saying: "I know that you have a great God, so do not abandon us, but stay in our city."

ἔγνω ὁ βασιλεὺς, ὅτι ἀνέστη ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν ἡ μάρτυς, καὶ ἔφριξε σφόδρα, μετακαλεσάμενος δὲ τὴν μακαρίαν προσπεσὼν δεήθη αὐτῆς λέγων· "Ἐγνων ὅτι μέγαν Θεὸν ἔχεις, διὸ μὴ ἐγκαταλίπῃς ἡμᾶς ἀλλ' ἔσο ἐν τῇ πόλει ἡμῶν διάγουσα. (*Pir* p.146.971–974)

Savor persecuted Irene in the most brutal way with the object of eliminating her from the face of the earth. After witnessing her resurrection,

⁸ Febronia is the only example of the heroines under discussion whose dismembered body is not miraculously reconstituted. When she dies, her body is a heap of bodily parts.

he realises that the power she possesses is supernatural and so changes his mind: instead of getting rid of her, he wants to keep her in his city because her power can be his own and his city's power.

The conversion to Christianity of the pagan tormenters and the spectators of martyrdoms constitutes the justification of the heroines' fight against pagans. The martyrs re-enact the passion of Christ who underwent self-sacrifice to manifest God's power over death but also more importantly and significantly to save humanity from sin. The martyrs' passion, apart from demonstrating the truth of the Christian religion, aim at saving human beings from their sins by converting them to Christianity.

The martyr's body exercises power not only because it is metaphysical but also through its natural beauty, which appears to be a result of her virginity. The virginal, pure body of the martyr captivates the admiring gaze of both her pagan tormenter and the spectators of her trial of martyrdom:

And when she entered, the emperor, having seen the extreme brightness of her face, fell madly in love with her. For she was emitting rays like the sun [...] on account of her bodily purity, so that even the crowd was astonished by her.

Καὶ ταύτης εἰσερχομένης, ἑωρακὼς τὸ ὑπέρλαμπρον τοῦ προσώπου αὐτῆς, ἦν μεμηνὼς πρὸς αὐτήν. Ἀκτῖνας γὰρ καθάπερ ὁ ἥλιος ἀπεδίδου [...] ἐκ τῆς σωματικῆς καθαρότητος, ὥς καὶ τὸ πλῆθος θαμβεῖσθαι ἐπ' αὐτῇ. (*PAec* ch.7)

The martyr's beautiful and young body exercises a form of influence over her pagan torturer who is vulnerable to its charms. All the torturers who fall in love with their female victims are prepared to offer them everything in order to make them their wives. In Catherine's Passion, Maxentius, who is driven wild with lust for her, offers even to have a portrait made of her and have her worshipped by everybody as a deity (*PAec* ch.14). The martyr's attractive body provokes the pagan's desire and magnetises him. The sight of it affects his reactions which he is unable to control. As soon as the emperor Hadrian sees the three virgins Pistis, Elpis and Agape, he is so impressed by their beauty that he cannot say a word to them (*PPisELAg* ch.2). Other torturers, being attracted by the martyrs' beautiful bodies, become less cruel to their victims because they feel incapable of harming their beauty:

The governor says: "Due to the sight of your beauty I am being converted to gentleness." [...] The governor was still troubled by her beauty, and felt sorry for her. He ordered the executioners to cease [the beating].

Ὁ ἡγεμὼν λέγει· "Τῇ μὲν θεωρίᾳ τοῦ κάλλους σου μεταβάλλομαι εἰς πραότητα." [...] Ὁ δὲ ἡγεμὼν ἔτι διαπηροῦτο ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτῆς καὶ ἐλυπεῖτο αὐτήν· καὶ κελεύει παύσασθαι τοὺς δημίους. (*PPar* chs.7-8)

In Catherine's Passion, the heroine's beauty exercises power both over the emperor Maxentius and his wife. His wife wants to meet Catherine because she wants to look at the face of such a beautiful and wise woman.

For she [the empress] had heard about [Catherine's] great wisdom and immense beauty and she strongly desired her. [...] And the empress said [...]: "I have a strong desire to meet the extremely wise maiden, Catherine."

Ἦκουσεν γὰρ περὶ τῆς πολλῆς αὐτῆς σοφίας καὶ τοῦ ἀμέτρου κάλλους, καὶ ἦν ἐπιθυμοῦσα αὐτήν σφόδρα [...] καὶ λέγει [...] ἡ βασίλισσα [...] "Πόθον ἔχω πολὺν τοῦ συντυχεῖν τῇ πανσόφῳ κόρῃ Αἰκατερίνῃ." (*PAec* ch.15)

In the end, with the help of Porphyriion, the empress visits the imprisoned Catherine, so running the risk of being caught and punished by her husband. Having seen Catherine's beauty, the empress is captivated by it and converts immediately:

And when she [the empress] saw her [Catherine's] face shining like the sun in the darkness, she was filled with great awe. She fell at her feet saying: "Blessed are you among women, for your face is not like that of earthly women, but is filled with the glory of heaven."

Καὶ ἰδοῦσα αὐτήν ὅτι ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς ὡς ὁ ἥλιος ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, φόβῳ πολλῷ συσχεθεῖσα, ἔπεσεν εἰς τοὺς πόδας αὐτῆς λέγουσα· "Μακαρία σὺ ἐν γυναιξίν· τὸ γὰρ πρόσωπόν σου οὐκ ἐστὶν ὅμοιον τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς γυναικῶν, ἀλλὰ δόξης οὐρανόυ πεπλήρωται". (*PAec* ch.15)

It is due to Catherine's beauty that the empress abandons her husband by becoming a Christian without fearing his brutal reaction. Maxentius, also captivated by Catherine's beauty, is likewise prepared to abandon his wife. He asks Catherine to become his wife and empress. For the royal couple Catherine is an object of desire. The emperor is sexually attracted to her, whereas the empress is spiritually attracted, but both are captivated by her through the same medium, her physical beauty which reflects her spiritual beauty.

When eventually the martyrs die, the pagan torturers want to prevent the burial of their dead bodies. They order that the martyrs' bodies be thrown to the animals or into the sea in a desperate attempt to disgrace and destroy them when dead, since they had failed to harm them when they were still alive (see e.g. the legends of Anastasia the Virgin and Charitine). But the martyrs' bodies manifest once more their sublime nature. They do not constitute prey for the carnivorous animals, as would be expected, because they are not flesh. They are the visible form of the martyrs' souls; they are the means through which their souls make their presence on earth perceptible.

Being superior to everything on earth, the holy body cannot be eaten and become part of an animal's body. Thus, the animals to which the holy body is given venerate it and become its guardians. They prevent human beings and other animals from touching it. The sea, on the other hand, protects the holy body by bringing it to dry land, where it is collected for burial.⁹ Yet these miracles and others, such as the removal of the dead body (an example is Catherine, whose body is brought by some angels to Mount Sinai, *PAec* ch.25) or the flowing from the holy woman's tomb of miraculous liquids that heal the sick (an example is Christina, *PChr* ch.31.5–7) express the holy body's power over disintegration and manifest the heroine's Christian identity and holiness. Accordingly, even though the martyrs consider themselves as a duality, one part of which—the body—is temporary, the texts themselves demonstrate that the body and the soul consist of the same substance, and that they constitute an eternal unity.

THE SPEAKING BODY

As mentioned earlier (pp. 33–34), the trial of martyrdom consists of two parts which are inextricably linked with each other: the interrogation and the heroines' sexually charged tortures. The tortures are the result of the interrogation and the tortures in turn lead to new interrogations. The torturer decides to torment the heroine after she has informed him during the interrogation that she is not prepared to follow his orders,

⁹ The body of Anastasia the Virgin, for example, is not eaten by the animals but instead protected until its burial (*PAnastV* ch.8). Charitine's body, having been thrown into the sea, comes out of it three days later and is buried by the Christian man who waits for it (*PChar* ch.7).

which is an indication of disrespect towards his political authority. The torturer's decision to punish the heroine results also from her *parrhesia* (outspokenness), as will be discussed later in this section.¹⁰ Each time the heroine comes intact out of the torture machines another interrogation follows, during which the pagan tormenter tries desperately to convince her to renounce her Christian faith through marrying him or sacrificing to the pagan gods. If he cannot punish her body and kill her so as to eradicate her from the face of the earth as a person who threatens the structure of his pagan society, then he will attempt to convince her through language to obey him and consequently to accept his superiority over her. Each new interrogation constitutes a new trial of martyrdom and the same procedure is repeated because every interrogation is followed by renewed torments. This cycle occurs because the heroine insists on her Christianity, which in most cases is equated with her wish not to marry, and she uses arrogant language that angers her torturer. Most of the texts discussed here are in essence divided simply into the acts of interrogation and the martyrdom.

Following this examination of the torture inflicted upon the martyrs and its effect on the bodies of both martyrs and spectators, we can now move to the second part of the martyrdom trial: the interrogation. Here what needs examination is how the martyr's discourse functions and what effect this has on the addressee, the pagan who organises the interrogation. We shall discover that the martyr's bodily tortures are closely associated with her discourse. Her tortures and her discourse are both founded in her body: her voice comes from the body, the object of the pagan's intended or actual torture.

Both the martyr's tortures and her discourse contribute to the theatrical aspect of the trial of martyrdom. Image and sound are two important elements of a theatrical performance. In the martyr's case, the audience sees her body being violated. The audience also hears the heroine's voice which in a patriarchal society is supposed to be heard in private rather than in public places (de Beauvoir 1953: 113–139). Through her voice, the heroine makes her Christian identity known to the public: "I am a Christian." This is her answer to the torturer's opening question: what is she called or who is she? The heroine defends herself and her belief in public through her resistant body and her discourse which oper-

¹⁰ For the theme of *parrhesia* in the acts of martyrs, see Butterweck 1995.

ates as a manifesto of the Christian religion, the philosophy of which is at the time still unknown to most of the people of the heroine's pagan city. During her interrogation the martyr has the opportunity to become a speaking subject that preaches with eloquence some of the Christian doctrines. She manages to convert her audience both through her body, which proves supernatural, and through her proselytising language which promulgates the Christian truth.

In order to describe the effects of the heroine's discourse on the pagan interrogator, I employ Judith Butler's term "injurious language". This term is applicable to the martyrs' legends where language (interrogation) and torture (physical pain) are so tightly connected. Butler's point of departure is that speech is a bodily act which can wound the addressee in the same way as other bodily acts, such as beating. Certain words or forms of address are so provocative and insulting that they act on the addressee "in ways that parallel the infliction of physical pain and injury" (Butler 1997: 4). According to Butler, the injurious effect of the insulting language lies in its power to demean the addressee who suffers a loss of context and control (Butler 1997: 4).

The content of the martyr's discourse and the way it is performed is "injurious". The heroine's language verbally hurts the torturer not only because it is insulting but also because it is unexpected. The torturer, who organises a public trial of martyrdom, does not expect that he will be insulted in public by a woman. During the interrogation the heroine mocks the pagan torturer's authority and his religion, which she presents as false. According to her, the almighty Creator of everything is the real and eternal Christian God, as formulated, for instance, by the martyr Photeine:

O emperor, our Lord Jesus Christ brought us [Photeine, her sons and sisters] before you today, so that we may prove to you that he is the true and eternal king and God, and convince you to consider him as the only God and the controller of everything, and [to prove] that the gods who are worshipped by you happen to be hollow idols and wooden statues, creations of human hands and devoid of sense.

Ἡμᾶς, ὃ βασιλεῦ, ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς παρέστησε σήμερον ἐνώπιόν σου, ἵνα σοι τοῦτον ἀληθῆ καὶ αἰώνιον βασιλέα καὶ Θεὸν ὑποδείξωμεν καὶ πείσωμεν αὐτὸν μόνον ἡγεῖσθαι Θεὸν καὶ προνοητὴν τοῦ παντός, τοὺς δὲ παρ' ὑμῶν σεβομένους εἶδωλα κωφὰ τυγχάνειν καὶ ξόανα, ἔργα χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων αἰσθήσεως ἄμοιρα. (PPh ch.20.12-17)

In addition, the martyr uses an insulting vocabulary against her torturer. The most common words that the heroines employ in order to offend their torturers are: "fool" (μωρός), "beast" (θηρίον), "disgraceful" (ἄτιμος), "enemy of truth" (τῆς ἀληθείας ἐχθρός), "vile" (μιαρός) and "wretched" (ἄθλιος). The pagan torturer is the object of the martyr's injurious language, whereas she is the object of his violence. The heroine's linguistic wounds against her torturer are avenged by bodily wounds, as the following extract from Christina's Passion indicates: "The holy woman says to him: 'Why do you blaspheme, you who are lawless and thrice-cursed?' Her father, not being able to bear the insult, ordered that she ascend on to the wheel" (λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ ἁγία: "τί βλασφημεῖς, ὁ νόμος καὶ τρισκατάρατε;" ὁ δὲ πατὴρ αὐτῆς μὴ φέρων τὴν ὕβριν ἐπρόσταξεν ἐνελεθεῖν αὐτὴν ἐν τῷ τροχῷ PChr ch.14.2-4).

Very often the interrogation acquires an ironic character; the martyr appears to make fun of her torturer. In Anastasia's Passion, for instance, Anastasia answers the prefect's question why she did not honour the pagan gods in the following way:

But I honoured them mightily indeed; since spider webs covered them, birds sat on them and defecated there, since mice lived inside them, I released them from such an insult. I melted them down and turned them into money which I gave to the needy.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ σφόδρα ἐτίμησα αὐτούς: τῶν γὰρ ἀραχνῶν περισκεπόντων αὐτούς καὶ τῶν ὀρνέων ἐπικαθεζομένων αὐτοῖς καὶ κοπριζόντων καὶ τῶν μυῶν ἐνοικούντων ἐνδον αὐτῶν, ἐγὼ τῆς τοσαύτης ὕβρεως ἀπήλλαξα αὐτούς καὶ χανεύσασα μετέβαλον εἰς χρήματα καὶ τοῖς δεομένοις ἐπιδέδωκα. (PAnastRom ch.24)

By pointing to the use of the pagan gods' golden idols by animals and birds as places where they can defecate and build their nests, Anastasia indicates in an ironic way that the idols should not be worshipped as deities by human beings. According to Anastasia, it is better that the golden idols be used to offer a living to human beings than to serve the needs of animals. Another example in which the martyr mocks her torturer is to be found in Tatiane's Passion. Tatiane says to the emperor Alexander:

"Alexander, order that I make a bloodless and stainless sacrifice to God, the Creator of everything, [...] so that I may become known to Apollo through my sacrifice, by making sure that he will not destroy the souls of

those who believe in the Saviour and our Lord Jesus Christ." The emperor [...], not understanding what the woman said, ordered that she enter the temple of Apollo and sacrifice. [...] The blessed woman entered [...] and said to the emperor: "See your error, emperor, it [the idol] has eyes that cannot see, ears that cannot hear [...] Do you still want me to approach it and sacrifice to it, emperor?" Alexander became very happy and without realising that he was being mocked, said: "Thank gods, Tatiane, for you are persuaded".

"Ἀλέξανδρε, κέλευσον οὖν θυσίαν με ἀναίμακτον καὶ ἀκηλίδωτον τῷ Θεῷ τῷ πάντῃ δημιουργοῦντι [...] ἐπιτελέσαι, ἵνα διὰ τῆς ἐμῆς θυσίας γνωρισθῶ τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι, ἔλεγχος αὐτοῦ γενομένη μὴ ἀπολλύναι αὐτὸν ψυχὰς τὰς ἐλπίζουσας ἐπὶ τὸν σωτῆρα καὶ κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν." Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς [...] μὴ συνιείς τὰ ὑπ' αὐτῆς λεγόμενα ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὴν ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος εἰσελθοῦσαν θῦσαι. (PTat ch.3)

[...] Εἰσῆλθεν δὲ ἡ μακαρία [...] καὶ λέγει τῷ βασιλεῖ: "Ἴδε τὴν πλάνην σου, βασιλεῦ· ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχει μὴ βλέποντας, ὦτα μὴ ἀκούοντα. [...] Θέλεις οὖν, βασιλεῦ, προσελθοῦσα θύσω τούτῳ;" Ὁ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος ἀδρώως περιχαρὴς γενόμενος, μὴ συνιείς ὅτι χλευάζεται λέγει: "Χάρις τοῖς θεοῖς, Τατιανή, ὅτι ἐπίσθης". (PTat ch.12)

Due to the heroine's offensive and irritating language the rules on which the interrogation is based are undermined. The pagan interrogator loses his role as the one who controls the interrogation's development and outcome. Through her influential speech, which the pagan is unable to question or debate, the martyr takes over the dominant role; "the emperor, angered by her words, was speechless for one hour, for not having been able to answer her" (Θυμωθεὶς δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπὶ τοῖς λόγοις αὐτῆς ἐνεὸς τε ἐπὶ ὥραν μίαν γενόμενος διὰ τὸ μὴ ἰσχύσαι ἀποκριθῆναι αὐτῇ. PAec ch.7). In some texts, such as the legend of Christina (PChr ch.21.4–6), the martyr becomes the pagan interrogator's interrogator and in this case the earthly trial of martyrdom is replaced by the heavenly one, where the holy woman as a representative of God interrogates the pagan who is going to be punished by God for his unfaithfulness (cf. above, "The Power of the Martyr's Body").

The martyr's speech becomes the vehicle by which the pagan male-dominated social structure is questioned. The torturer is surprised to find himself being verbally mistreated by a person who is not only politically inferior to him but also a woman and thus traditionally silent when men speak. This fact makes the pagan interrogator feel out of place. The

loss of his dominant position leads to the loss of his temper and his voice. The heroine's language, like her sublime body, provokes the same feelings of anger on the part of the pagan torturer. He gets angry, not only because he cannot have her or harm her body, but also because he is insulted by her language.

The fact that the torturer cannot affect the martyr's voice is very well demonstrated in the examples of the heroines whose tongues are cut off in an attempt to have their irritating voices silenced. After the cutting of her tongue, Christina reacts in the following way:

The martyr picked up her cut-off tongue and threw it at Julian's face and he immediately became blind. And a voice came out of the tongue, saying: "Julian, you are a disgrace, you wanted to devour my breasts and you cut off my tongue that praises God; you have justly lost your sight."

ἐπάρασα ἡ μάρτυς τὸ κόμμα τῆς γλώττης αὐτῆς ἔρριπεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ καὶ εὐθέως ἐτυφλώθη. καὶ φωνὴ ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τῆς γλώττης λέγουσα: Ἰουλιανὲ ἄτιμε, ἐπεθύμησας φαγεῖν πάντας τοὺς μασθοὺς μου καὶ ἀπέκοψας τὴν γλώττάν μου εὐλογοῦσαν τὸν Θεόν· δικαίως καὶ τὸ φῶς σου ἀπώλεσας. (PChr ch.30.1–6)

In the above passage not only is Christina's cut off tongue not deprived of its ability to speak but it also hurts the torturer in both a verbal and a physical way. It demeans and insults him by calling him "disgraceful", and at the same time it blinds him. This is an example where the injurious language finds a literal and at the same time a metaphorical application. The injurious language, formulated through the instrument of the tongue, creates a bodily wound. Even though the heroine's voice is separated from her body by her severed tongue, it is not silenced. It continues to be as injurious as before.

The Body as Text – The Text as Body

As depicted in the examined texts, the martyr's body is distinguished by its virginity, an attribute which is completely controlled by the heroine and is distinctive of her femininity. The heroine gains control over her own body through the practice of virginity. She keeps her body for herself and masters it by not allowing her torturer or other men who want to marry her to possess it. Virginity is the bodily characteristic that determines and defines her identity, in the first place as a woman and in the

second as a Christian. The word "virgin" (παρθένος) very often stands for the heroines' names and identities. They are called "virgins" and not their actual names by both their hagiographers and the pagan torturers. In many cases, as already stated, the heroines are punished and acquire holiness through their martyrdom exactly because they want to keep their virginity untouched. Their virginity becomes a synonym for Christianity. The preservation of virginity symbolises the defence of faith. Virginity, as a Christian practice exercised first by the ideal woman, Mary the Mother of Christ, is presented in the examined texts as a crucial element in the construction of the martyr's sanctity. The great majority of the heroines are virgins, only a few are mothers (e.g. Photeine [PPh] and Perpetua [PPer]) and even the married martyrs are virgins who lead a chaste married life. Such an example is Anastasia the Roman who feigns illness in order to avoid intercourse with her husband (καὶ ταῦτα ἔπραττεν τὸ συνοικέσιον τοῦ ἑαυτῆς ἀνδρὸς προσποιήσας ἀσθενείας καταλιμπάνουσα. *PAnastRom* ch.2). Virginity is, of course, a bodily characteristic also of the female saints who perform other roles of sanctity, such as the virgin, the nun, the abbess, the solitary and the cross-dresser. Nevertheless, with the exception of the role of the virgin, virginity is not stressed in the other female roles to such a great degree as in the case of the martyr.

Behind the strong emphasis on virginity found in the legends of martyrs lie established Christian ideologies concerning virginity. The Byzantine hagiographers incorporate in their texts the most authoritative discourse of the Church Fathers about virginity. In the fourth century AD, the theme of virginity occupied the theologians of the time (Cameron 1989; Castelli 1986; Cloke 1995: 57–81; Shaw 1998.). Influential theologians such as John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Ancyra all wrote treatises on virginity, in which female chastity is presented as the ideal of Christian perfection. In his treatise on virginity, addressed mainly at women, John Chrysostom defines virginity as more than abstinence from sexual life, since it should involve purity of soul and consecration to Christ: "It is necessary that the virgin not only be pure in body, but also in soul, if she is to receive the holy spouse [...]. Virginity is defined by the sanctity of both the body and the spirit" (τὴν γὰρ παρθένον οὐ τῷ σώματι μόνον καθαρὰν εἶναι δεῖ ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ, εἴ γε μέλλοι τὸν ἅγιον ὑποδέχασθαι νυμφίον [...] τοίνυν παρθενίας ὅρος τὸ καὶ σώματι καὶ πνεύματι εἶναι ἁγίαν. *De virginitate* 5.2.17–19, 6.1.13–14).

This definition of virginity by John Chrysostom is echoed in the discussed texts. The virgin heroines are presented as Christ's brides and their virginity is at the same time a bodily and a spiritual characteristic which reflects the purity of their souls.

In his treatise on virginity Gregory of Nyssa claims that the adoption of virginity allows one to participate in the heavenly quality of "incorruptibility" which defeats death:

The process of generation starts off the process of corruption, but those who by virginity desist from procreation set a limit within themselves for death and by their own action have checked death's progress. [...] a body is justly called "incorruptible" that does not render service in a dying world nor become the instrument of corruptible creatures. (tr. Cloke 1995: 59)

ἀπὸ γὰρ γενέσεως ἡ φθορὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχει, ἥς οἱ παυσάμενοι διὰ τῆς παρθενίας ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἔστησαν τὴν τοῦ θανάτου περιγραφὴν, περαιτέρω προελθεῖν αὐτὸν δι' ἑαυτῶν κωλύσαντες. [...] καλῶς ἀφθορον ὀνομάζεται σῶμα τὸ μὴ ὑπουργῆσαν τῇ τοῦ φθαροῦ βίου ὑπηρεσίᾳ μηδὲ τῆς θνητῆς διαδοχῆς ὄργανον γενέσθαι καταδεξάμενον. (*De virginitate* 14.1.1–15)

As we have seen in the previous analysis, the virgin martyrs possess also the quality of "incorruptibility", since their bodies appear to be sublime.

Claudia Rapp has argued that hagiographical texts have the power to provoke the participation of hagiographers and their audiences in the holiness of the depicted saints (Rapp 1998: 432). In the texts discussed here approached through the aspect of the body, a similar process can be recognised. These texts, which refer to the martyr's body and its manifestations, provide the Christians with religious experience. The sacred body and its holy performances, revived through the texts, become present and visible "theatres" for all the persons related to these texts: the hagiographers, the scribes of different times who reproduce and multiply the texts and the texts' actual listening or reading audiences, which change through the centuries.

The martyrdoms which occurred during the first Christian centuries and are remote in time are made real centuries later through their textual performances. The temporal distance is rendered through the text as a closeness to the martyr's body and through her body to her spirituality and holiness. The holy body reaches the Christians as text(s) through which the faithful communicate with the holy person and by extension with God. God, the Word who became body in order to make His ex-

istence visible and comprehensible among people, again becomes present through the miracles He performs upon the martyr's body, which can be experienced by the faithful through the actual word, the text.

By offering their bodies for sacrifice, saints remain in contact with God. In the texts they are depicted as communicating with Him; they are able to see Him, hear Him and talk to Him. This places them in the privileged position of being able to act as mediators between the earthly and the divine. On one hand, they make possible the people's experience of the divine; on the other, they undertake the role of the advocate of the people's welfare and salvation. Their advocacy takes place before their death. In Paraskeve's Passion, for example, the heroine just before her decapitation, says to God: "Receive my spirit and [...] grant to those who commemorate my name a peaceful life and release them from their sins" (δέξαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου [...] καὶ δὸς τοῖς μνημονεύουσι τοῦ ὀνόματός μου εἰρηνικὴν βιοτήν καὶ ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν. *PPar* ch.10).

In Marina's Passion, Christ himself appears so that He can confirm the realisation of Marina's last wish before dying. Christ says to her: "I came for this reason, that I might give a favourable ear to those who pray to me through you. Demand from me whatever you want and I will fulfil your request" (διὰ τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα, ὅπως ἐπακούσωμαι τῶν διὰ σοῦ με παρακαλούντων· νῦν αἰτήσαι με εἴ τι δὲν βούλῃ καὶ τελειώσω σου τὴν αἴτησιν. *PMarAnt* p.42.36–39). Thus the writing, reading or hearing of the martyr's legend become acts of commemoration. When the holy woman asks for the welfare of the people who commemorate her, she refers mainly to her hagiographer and the audience of her legend because they are the ones who through her text come to know the benefits of her commemoration to them. Thus the text functions as a miraculous book; through its writing, reading or hearing physical and spiritual health can be restored.

The text, having the power to heal the sick who come in contact with it, behaves as the martyr's relic which cures the sick people who touch it. The three avenues which bring the people in contact with the martyr are her icon, her Passion and her relic. The relic, unlike the icon and the text, cannot be present always and everywhere. Either it is to be found in a remote city which not all Christians are able to visit as pilgrims or it disappears, as is the case with the dead body of Irene (*PIr* p.147.1015–1019). The absent body is replaced by the icon(s) and the text(s), which can always be copied and multiplied. As for the replacement of the saint's

body by the text, this is very well illustrated in the Passion of Marina during the heroine's last prayer to Christ:

And if someone takes pains to write my martyrdom and if someone obtains it, let his name be in the book of life. And where it [the martyrdom] is read, wherever that may be, let it be a sign of good and the demons shall flee from that place. And if someone is weighed down by sins and listens to my martyrdom, free him from every sorrow and release him from his sins. And if my book is in someone's hands and he puts it on his knees, he shall be absolved from his transgressions and being thus liberated he shall honour the place where he lived. Moreover, I ask of you, my Lord, if someone writes and reads it and listens to its being read out loud, from that day let everyone be freed from his sins [...]. And if they suffered from something before that, after hearing about my writings, they shall be saved, and no famine or death of cattle will occur there. And let no one who listens to them [the writings] be condemned for a minor offence.

καὶ εἴ τις δὲν τὸ μαρτύριόν μου γράψῃ ἐκ τῶν κόπων αὐτοῦ, καὶ εἴ τις αὐτὸ κτήσεται, γεννηθήτω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῆς ζωῆς. καὶ ἔνθα ἂν ἀναγνώσθῃ, ἐν τῷ τόπῳ οὐ ἓάν ἐστι, γεννηθήτω ἐκεῖ σημεῖον εἰς ἀγαθόν, καὶ οἱ δαίμονες φυγαδευθήσονται ἀπὸ τοῦ τόπου ἐκείνου. ἔάν δὲ καὶ βεβαρημένος τις ὑπὸ ἁμαρτιῶν ἢ καὶ ἀκούσῃ τοῦ μαρτυρίου μου, ἐλευθέρωσον αὐτὸν ἀπὸ πάσης θλίψεως καὶ ἀπόλυσον τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτοῦ· καὶ εἴ τις εἰς χεῖράς ἐστι τὸ βιβλίον μου καὶ θήσῃ αὐτὸ πρὸς τὰ γόνατα αὐτοῦ, ἀπαλλαγῇ τῶν παραπτωμάτων, καὶ οὕτως ἐλευθερωθεὶς τιμήσῃ τὸν τόπον ἔνθα ἔμεινεν. καὶ ἔτι δέομαί σου, κύριε, ἔάν γράψῃ καὶ ἀναγνώσῃ αὐτὸ καὶ ἐπακούσῃ αὐτοῦ τῇ ἀναγνώσει, ἐλευθερωθήσονται ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ἡμέρας πάντες ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν [...] εἰ δὲ καὶ πρὸ τούτου ἔπασχόν τι, μετὰ τὸ ἐπακοῦσαι τῶν γραφῶν μου σωθήσονται· καὶ μὴ γένηται ἐκεῖ λιμὸς ἢ θάνατος βοῶν. καὶ διὰ πταίσμα μικρὸν ὃ ἐπακούσας αὐτῶν μὴ καταδικασθήσεται. (*PMarAnt* p.43.17–30, p.44.34–37)

Christ who is present during this prayer replies to Marina:

And where your body is laid, I send to that place my mercy. And where the commemoration of your fight is to be found, I send my angels to give them [the people of that place] the courage to defeat the devil. Therefore you shall know, Marina, that I have placed a seal on your commemoration through which remission of sins shall occur.

καὶ ἔνθα σου κείμενον ὑπάρχει τὸ σῶμα, ἀποστέλλω τὸ ἔλεός μου εἰς τὸν τόπον ἐκεῖνον· καὶ ἔνθα ὑπάρχει σου τὰ ὑπομνήματα τῆς ἀθλήσεως, ἀποστέλλω τοὺς ἀγγέλους μου τοῦ δοῦναι αὐτοῖς τὸ θαρρεῖν ὥστε νικῆσαι τὸν

διάβολον. διὸ γίνωσκε Μαρίνα, ὅτι εἰς τὰ ὑπομνήματά σου σφραγίδα ἐδέμην·
δι' ὧν ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν γενήσεται. (*PMarAnt* p.44.9–15)

The corpus of the examined Passions is the textual locus where the martyr's body and its story are inscribed. The speaking, fragmented and reconstituted female body exists only as written words in a body of many texts that were written and rewritten, copied and recopied throughout the Byzantine era. In essence, the martyr's body and its manifestations hold the key role in the Passions discussed; these texts are about the martyr's body, which is both depicted through language and limited by it. Each Passion's length depends on the duration of the body's performance. The more the body speaks and the more it is tortured and effectively restored, the longer the text becomes. And vice-versa; the less functional the body, the shorter the text. This analogy between text and body suggests that the one stands for the other; the body "writes" the text and the text "writes" the body.

CHAPTER 2

The Three Bodies of the Repentant Prostitute

Introduction

The sinful women commemorated in Byzantine female Lives for attaining sanctification through penitence are harlots. The term "harlot" is employed here in its biblical sense, as defined by Kathy Gaca (1999: 36). A harlot is a woman who is "sexually immoral", that is a woman who transgresses the sexual regulations of married or non-married life. A harlot is also a prostitute when she earns a material reward for her harlotry. Gaca points out the semantic confusion of the term "harlot" (πόρνη) that exists in patristic and Byzantine Greek writings. A harlot can be one of the following: a seductress who does not necessarily commit a sexual act, a victim of rape, an adulteress or a prostitute (Gaca 1999).

The Lives of female penitents constitute further examples which prove Gaca's argument that the word harlot (πόρνη) is used in Byzantine writings as a label for women of different sexual types. The holy penitents are divided into two categories: the prostitute and the adulteress. In their Lives, however, the members of both categories are called harlots (πόρνοι).

The use of the same term (πόρνη) to describe both a prostitute and a woman who betrays her husband only once, driven by the continuous advances of another man (Theodora of Alexandria), equates in a way the sins of the prostitute with the one sexual sin of the adulteress. This equation is proved practically in the penitence undertaken by the prostitute and the adulteress in the hagiographical texts; both types of women punish themselves very harshly. Paradoxically, the punishment of the adulteress Theodora of Alexandria for her sin appears to be even more severe than those of the other harlots. In fact, she is punished twice. Her first punishment is to deny her female identity by cross-dressing and entering a male monastery; her second punishment is her expulsion from the monastery after being falsely accused of impregnating the daugh-

ter of an abbot. While outside the monastery, she has to suffer humiliation, bad weather conditions and hunger. In addition, she has to bring up the son whom she is accused of fathering (see also below, Chapter 3).

Despite the fact that for Byzantine hagiographers an adulteress and a prostitute seem to be sinners to the same degree, this chapter will focus only on the Lives of holy prostitutes. These texts, due to the lives of prostitution that their heroines lead, appear to be different from the Life of Theodora, the adulteress whose sin lasts only for one night. The sinful life is very central in the Lives of prostitutes, whereas this is not the case for Theodora. Thus the texts which will be discussed in this chapter are the following: the Life of Eudokia (*VEud BHG* 604), the Life of Pelagia (*VPel BHG* 1478),¹ the Life of Taïsia (*VTaes BHG* 1695) and the Life of Mary of Egypt (*VMarAeg BHG* 1042).

Since its edition in 1668, Eudokia's Life has not been studied at all; no scholar has devoted a line to its possible date, authorship or place of composition. Most probably the Life was written between the fifth and seventh centuries, the chronological span in which the lives of the other holy harlots were written (Patlagean 1976; Talbot 1996a: xii–xiii). Eudokia is a Samaritan prostitute living in Heliopolis, who by chance hears about the principles of Christianity from a monk called Germanos. Germanos shuts her in a room for a week in order for her to perform her penance. When he lets her out she is baptised a Christian and she gives her riches to the poor. Later she is taken by Germanos to a nunnery, where she becomes the successor of the abbess who has died. Her former lovers, not being able to accept her transformation, inform the pagan emperor Aurelian, who persecutes the Christians, about her Christian identity. Due to a miracle, Aurelian's soldiers are unable to arrest Eudokia. In the end Aurelian, along with his family convert to Christianity. After Aurelian's death, a pagan governor called Diogenes arrests Eudokia, but the tortures he imposes on her do not harm her. Eudokia converts also Diogenes to Christianity and she is then let free. Vikentios, Diogenes' successor, puts an end to Eudokia's earthly life by ordering her decapitation.

Pelagia's Life is dated to the fifth century (Petitmengin 1981: 39). The author of the Life appears to be a certain James, the deacon of the legendary bishop Nonnos.² Pelagia is an actress in Antioch. Her encounter

with Nonnos and his influential teaching leads her to renounce her way of life. She encloses herself in a cell on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, where she is visited by James three years later. It is James who discovers her dead body the second time he goes to see her. Until her death everybody, except Nonnos, thinks that she is a eunuch. Her female identity is revealed when her body is prepared for burial.

Taïsia's Life goes back to the fifth or sixth century (Nau 1902: 72). The author of the text is anonymous. Taïsia is a prostitute from Alexandria, whom the monk Serapios decides to lead to salvation. He disguises himself as a layman and pays a visit to her. He then makes her recognise her sinful life which she renounces. After she has burnt all her riches in the town centre, Serapios confines her to a cell. Three years later he lets her out, after having been informed that a monk had a vision in which Taïsia's crown of sanctity appeared. Taïsia dies fifteen days later in the nunnery where she has been brought by Serapios.

The Life of Mary of Egypt is dated to the seventh century. In the manuscripts, the Life is attributed to Sophronios, Patriarch of Jerusalem from 634 to 638 (Kouli 1996: 66). Some scholars consider the Life a work of Sophronios (Delehay 1991: 53; Delmas 1900–1901: 37), whereas others do not accept his authorship (Beck 1959: 435). The story of Mary is the following: the young heroine leaves her house and goes to Alexandria where she leads a dissolute life. One day she joins some pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem. On the way, she seduces many of her male co-travellers. After her arrival in Jerusalem she goes on seducing the men of the city. On the feast day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Mary, following some faithful Christians, tries to enter the church of Constantine on Golgotha (Kouli 1996: 82, n. 48) but is prevented by an invisible force. Then she realises that the reason for this is her sinful life. In a prayer, she asks the Virgin to let her go into the church and promises that she will give up her life as a prostitute. Keeping her promise, she goes to the desert where she performs her repentance for seventeen years and stays for another thirty-one years. During her forty-seventh year in the desert, Mary is discovered by a monk called Zosimas, who hears her story and brings her holy communion a year later, just before her death. Zosimas is the person who finds the dead body of Mary and buries it. He is also the one who makes her story known to the male monastic circles of his time.

The legends of Pelagia, Taïsia and Mary the Egyptian were "best-

¹ The text discussed here is version π from the edition by Petitmengin et al. 1981.

² For the historicity of Nonnos, see Brock and Ashbrook-Harvey 1987: 40.

sellers" in the Middle Ages both in the East and the West.³ The Greek Lives of these holy prostitutes, which are considered to be the originals, were adapted directly into Latin, Syriac and Arabic. Some of these adaptations were in turn re-adapted into other languages, as is the case of the Latin versions which were translated into the medieval vernacular languages.

The literary popularity of the holy prostitutes' legends during the Middle Ages is a reality that we, as modern readers of their Lives, cannot fully explain. Pierre Petitmengin attributes the success of Pelagia's legend to the solidity of its narrative structure (Petitmengin 1981: 38). It is true that the legend of Pelagia, as well as those of the other holy harlots, survive in quite pleasant and interesting narratives. The central motif of the transformation of the heroines' lives from one situation to its opposite, i.e. from sinfulness to holiness, contributes significantly to the attractiveness of the narratives, and to their success in the wider public.

I would argue that the widespread appeal of the holy penitents' legends also can be ascribed to their prominent sexual element. The holy penitents' Lives, written by men and being originally addressed to men, as we can assume from their male narrators and their implied male listeners, provided their audiences with the images of the heroines' beautiful bodies and their "sexy" lives as prostitutes. Referring to the Life of Mary of Egypt, Simon Gaunt suggests that the male audiences of the text enjoyed both the spectacle of the sexual life of a prostitute and the effacement of her bodily beauty through her self-punishment for having "destroyed many men's souls" (Gaunt 1995: 219). That Mary's tale can offer entertainment due to its sexual topic is even implied by Zosimas, the monk to whom she relates her life-story. When Mary tells him:

I warned you, Father Zosimas, do not force me to describe to you my disgrace. For Lord knows how I shudder to defile both you and the air with my words. (tr. Kouli 1996: 81)

Εἶπόν σοι, ἀββᾶ Ζωσιμᾶ, μὴ ἀναγκάσης εἰπεῖν σοὶ τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην μου φρίττω γάρ, οἶδεν ὁ Κύριος, μολύνουσα καὶ σὲ καὶ τὸν ἀέρα τοῖς λόγοις μου. (VMarAeg ch.19)

³ For Mary of Egypt, see Coon 1997: 84; Kouli 1996: 67–68; Poppe and Ross 1996; Walker 1972; Walsh-Makris 1989: 68–69; for Pelagia, see Brock and Ashbrook-Harvey 1987: 41; Coon 1997: 77; Petitmengin 1981; Petitmengin et al. 1981; for Taïsia, see Nau 1902.

he answers:

Speak, my mother, in the name of the Lord, speak and do not interrupt the flow of such a beneficial narration. (tr. Kouli 1996: 81)

Λέγε διὰ τὸν Κύριον, ὦ μητέρα μου, λέγε, καὶ μὴ ἐγκόψῃς τὸν [εἰρμὸν] τῆς παύσης ἐπωφελοῦς διηγήσεως. (VMarAeg ch.20)

The largest part of Mary's tale is about lurid sexual adventures. Its very content renders it improper for an ascetic who has renounced sexual life. This is what Mary implies when she says to Zosimas that her story might "defile" him. Zosimas' response is quite unexpected; does he really mean that he finds such a story "beneficial" or rather enjoyable? How could the sexual life of a prostitute be beneficial for a saintly monk? Of course Zosimas, and through him the hagiographer, would not have dared to call Mary's story enjoyable, since saints' Lives are not supposed to offer any sexual entertainment—far from that—but edification. The narration of Mary has to be presented as beneficial, otherwise it cannot be legitimised, and consequently it cannot operate as a pious narrative. The role of the listener that Zosimas plays here is the one undertaken by the implied audiences of the Life. His reaction to the content of Mary's story reflects, on one hand, that of the implied audiences and, on the other, it determines the way in which it should be perceived by them, that is as an edifying narrative.⁴ However, the wide popularity of Mary's and the other holy prostitutes' legends suggests that they were more entertaining than beneficial.

The legends of holy prostitutes demonstrate that a sinful life can have a positive function if the person who sins comes to acknowledge his/her sins and decides to undergo a harsh penitence for them. The penitence as the result of a sinful life leads to holiness. Thus sin, penitence and holiness are three key concepts in the Lives of the holy prostitutes determining the structure of these hagiographical texts, as will be explored in further detail in this chapter. Each of these three concepts corresponds to a different way of life. In fact, the holy prostitutes are depicted as having three lives: as prostitutes, penitents and saints. In the epilogue of his text, the hagiographer of Pelagia sums up the three lives of his heroine in the following way: "This is the life of the harlot; this is the

⁴ Later in this chapter, the degree to which the holy prostitutes' Lives function as means of edification will be further discussed (pp. 75–77).

conduct of the desperate; may the Lord let us find mercy along with her on the day of Judgement" (Οὗτος ὁ βίος τῆς πόρνῆς· αὕτη ἡ πολιτεία τῆς ἀπεγνωσμένης· μεθ' ἧς καὶ ἡμᾶς δῶη ὁ κύριος εὐρεῖν ἔλεος ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως. *VPel* ch.51.355–356).

As it will be shown in this chapter, the three lives of the heroines are defined and experienced by themselves, by the male characters of their narratives and by the audiences of the texts through the heroines' bodies. Each way of life forces their bodies into taking a certain shape. The different ways in which the heroines' bodies behave during each of their lives suggest that they have not only three lives but also three bodies.

The heroines' lives in the corresponding bodies appear as performances of which the textual audiences are the heroines themselves and the male characters who encounter them. The lives/bodies of the heroines under examination are spectacles seen and interpreted from different narrative perspectives: those of the narrators, the heroines themselves and some male characters. A politics of seeing is at work in the texts, where the way in which the heroines' bodies are seen defines the value of their lives and determines the way in which these texts should be perceived by their audiences. The vital role that the three lives/bodies of the holy prostitutes play in the examined texts is what structures this chapter. It consists of three parts corresponding to the heroines' three lives/bodies: "The Sinful Body", "The Repentant Body" and "The Holy Body".

The Sinful Body

The heroines' engagement in prostitution is chronologically the first phase of their narrated lives, since they appear to adopt the prostitute's life from a young age. Mary the Egyptian, for instance, commences her life as a prostitute at the age of twelve (*VMarAeg* ch.18). Until reaching the age of twelve, Mary, living under the control and protection of her parents, is unable to act on her own. Her life begins as soon as she becomes an independent individual by escaping from her parents and the safety of the family environment. It is immediately after this decisive moment that the heroine's life acquires a significance for both herself and the narrative which is devoted to her deeds. Taïsia is given no other choice in life: her mother forces her to become a prostitute from childhood (ἐκ παιδότην; *VTaes* p.86.20). Whereas the holy women under-

making other roles of sainthood are initiated into the Christian teachings during their early years, the holy prostitutes are introduced into the "devil's workshop" (τὸ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐργαστήριον, *VPel* ch.30.216–217) instead, this being the metaphor the hagiographers employ when referring to the life of prostitution.

During the heroines' lives as prostitutes, a self emerges called sinful by the hagiographers, certain male characters of the texts and the central heroines themselves. "I am the open sea of sins" (*VPel* ch.24.173–174) exclaims Pelagia, when she sees her life as a prostitute through the lenses of Christianity. What creates the sinful self of the prostitute is the way in which she treats her body. Instead of devoting her body to the spiritual spouse, Christ, as the virgin and the widowed holy women do, the prostitute offers it to a number of men for sexual intercourse. Whereas a holy woman disregards her body and its needs completely, the prostitute appears to have as her only aim the embellishment of her body and the satisfaction of its appetites both nutritional and sexual. Pelagia, for instance, spends a lot of time on the preparation of her bodily appearance in order to become as beautiful and attractive as possible (*VPel* ch.9.55–59).

Mary of Egypt, to mention a second example, has a strong inclination towards bodily pleasures. She loves wine and food (*VMarAeg* ch.28) but her passion is sexual intercourse. In her attempt to acquire as many lovers as possible and thus satisfy her continuous desire for sex, Mary does not accept money from her lovers, despite the fact that she does not have enough to live on (*VMarAeg* ch.18). In this sense, Mary is not a typical prostitute. Unlike the other heroines, Mary does not make a fortune out of prostitution. Nevertheless, she does put her body on the market, since she uses it as a payment for things she wants to have. This is how she, for instance, pays for her trip to the Holy Land (*VMarAeg* ch.19) and gets the good food and wine she desires. The fact that the heroines' sinful selves are manifested in the treatment of their bodies results in the equation of the sinful self with the sinful body. The female sinful self, as depicted in the Lives of the holy prostitutes, shapes the sinful body and is shaped by it.

The heroines' sinful selves/bodies are outlined in the texts from three different perspectives. The first perspective belongs to an impersonal figure that is the external and anonymous narrator of the texts (*VEud* and *VTaes*). The second perspective is that of a male person of the narra-

tive who observes the heroine's sinful body and thereby provides an interpretation of the heroine's life (*VPel*). Like the second perspective, and in contrast to the first one, the third point of view is also internal, since it comes from the heroine herself. She relates the story of her sinful life to another person of the narrative and thus also, in effect, to the reader or the listener of the text (*VMarAeg*). In each of these three perspectives, different aspects of the prostitute's sinful self/body are presented. This happens because each of these persons (external narrator, male character, heroine), due to his/her role in the narrative and the degree of his/her (male character, heroine) self-knowledge, perceives the sinful self/body of the prostitute differently.

THE SINFUL BODY FROM THE EXTERNAL NARRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

The account of Taïsia's sinful life commences in the following way:

There was in Alexandria a certain young woman of extreme beauty called Taïsia, who exceeded in beauty even those women who had once been admired for their lovely bodies. [...] And the reputation of her beauty spread. And many men came from afar to gaze at her. And both the foreigners and her fellow citizens were captivated by her beauty. And as a hind shot in the liver, thus they were wounded by the arrow of desire. For when they saw the brightness of her face and the form of her whole body, they were seized by a shameless desire and the madness [caused] by her charms burnt inside them like a flame. Becoming thus infatuated, these men put aside their possessions and their affairs in order to satisfy their immodest desire. Because of her, many men sold the possessions of their parents, others did not even spare their own clothes and others learnt how to rob in order to satisfy their shameful desire. And thus being a death-trap for many men, she ruined every day her own soul and that of all the men who approached her.

Ἐγένετο κόρη τις ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ ὀνόματι Ταῖσία, ὥραιότατη σφόδρα, πλεονεκτοῦσα ἐν τῷ κάλλει καὶ τὰς ποτὲ θαυμαζομένας ἐπ' εὐμορφίᾳ. [...] Καὶ διέδραμε τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κάλλους αὐτῆς. Καὶ πολλοὶ ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἤρχοντο τοῦ θεάσασθαι αὐτήν· καὶ ἐσαγηνεύοντο τῷ κάλλει αὐτῆς οἱ τε ξένοι καὶ οἱ ἐντόπιοι. Καὶ ὥσπερ ἔλαφος τοξευθεῖσα εἰς τὸ ἦπαρ, οὕτως τῆς ἐπιθυμίας ἐτιτρώσκοντο τῷ βέλει. Θεωροῦντες γὰρ τὸ φαιδρὸν τοῦ προσώπου αὐτῆς, καὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν τοῦ παντὸς σώματος ἔρωτι ἐξέπιπτον ἀναιδεῖ, καὶ ὥσπερ φλὸξ ἐκαίετο εἰς αὐτοὺς ἡ μανία τοῦ φίλτρου αὐτῆς. Καὶ οὕτως ἐμμανεῖς γενόμενοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ὑπερέωρων χρημάτων καὶ πραγμάτων, πρὸς τὸ τυχεῖν τῆς ἀσέμνου ἐπιθυμίας. Πολλοὶ οὖν δι' αὐτήν τὰ τῶν γονέων ἐπίπρασκον πράγματα, ἄλλοι δὲ οὐδὲ τῶν ἱματίων αὐτῶν ἐφείδοντο, καὶ ἕτεροι ληστεύ-

εἰν ἐμάνθανον, πρὸς τὸ πληρῶσαι τὴν αἰσχροὺς ἐπιθυμίαν, καὶ οὕτως παγίς πολλοῖς καὶ βόθρος θανάτου τυγχάνουσα, τὴν τε αὐτῆς ψυχὴν καθ' ἐκάστην ἐβράθιζε καὶ πάντων τῶν πλησιαζόντων αὐτῇ. (*VTaes* p.86.14–17, p.88.2–19, p.90.1–2)

The image of Taïsia's body provided by the narrator in the above passage is that of an object immobilised in a frame or on a scene from where it is made visible to the male spectators who can afford to see it. The "framed" body of Taïsia, being famous for its extreme beauty, and exposed to public view, attracts male spectators who come from far away in order to gaze at it. The fact that the hagiographer uses words such as θεάσασθαι and θεωροῦντες in order to introduce the male spectators of the heroine's beauty, contributes to the presentation of her body as a spectacle.

The implicit depiction of Taïsia's beauty as the subject of a painting becomes explicit in Eudokia's Life (*VEud* ch.1) where the narrator, employing a literary topos referring to female beauty, says that Eudokia is so beautiful that not even a painter could portray her beauty.⁵ The narrator of Eudokia's life offers an image of the heroine's sinful self/body which does not differ substantially from the one given by the narrator of Taïsia's life. Probably the presentation of the one heroine's sinful self/body is modelled on that of the other. Since the date of Eudokia's Life has not been established, it is difficult to say which presentation had influenced which.

Even though Taïsia's body appears to be the centre of attraction in the above quotation, it is not described in detail. The narrator refers only to its excessive beauty which seems to lie in the heroine's bright face and well-shaped figure. Taïsia's body is not "shown" to the reader or the listener of the text, whereas it is both shown and offered to all her lovers. In fact, none of the heroines examined in the present chapter appears naked while being a prostitute.

The martyr's body, as stated above (Chapter 1), is stripped naked at the scene of martyrdom. The reader or the listener of a martyr's Passion can have a glimpse both of her young virgin body being tortured and of specific parts of it characteristic of her sexuality, such as her snow-white and round breasts as they are being cut off. The enforced expo-

⁵ In the Life of his sister Macrina, Gregory of Nyssa states that Macrina was so beautiful when she was young that not even a painter could portray her beauty (*VMac* ch.4.8–9).

sure of the virgin martyr's body is presented by the hagiographers as an act manifesting, on one hand, the pagan torturer's viciousness and revengeful feelings against a virgin woman and, on the other, the heroine's steadfastness in Christianity, since she is prepared to endure everything, even nakedness in public, in order to defend the principles of her faith. The martyr's nakedness is a sign of resistance against the pagan torturer, whereas a harlot's nakedness is a sign of sin. Thus, the sinful body of the prostitute is never depicted naked in the texts. However, the body of the holy prostitute, being sanctified through repentance, appears naked. When Zosimas meets Mary the Egyptian in the desert, she is naked. In this case, the nakedness of the heroine's body is part of her holy self. Like the martyr's nakedness, Mary's nakedness is a symbol of her devotion to God.

In the passage from the Life of Taïsia quoted above, the narrator indirectly portrays the attractive body of the heroine, yet he illustrates very graphically its effects on its male spectators. As soon as they see Taïsia, men are wounded by the arrow of love. They then suffer from a desire for the heroine which "burns inside them like a fire". The lust of these men is presented as unnatural since it is caused by magic, the charms the heroine uses in order to captivate her lovers. Because the men's lust is excessive, it leads them to insanity which is expressed in their indifference to important things in life and in their violation of social rules. Taïsia's admirers care about nothing else but the satisfaction of their sexual desires. They sacrifice everything in order to be able to buy their contact with her; they sell their fortunes, some of them even sell their own clothes and some others become thieves. By losing their minds, Taïsia's admirers also damage their souls which are overwhelmed by their sexual appetites.

The imagery of arrows, suffering, fire and insanity as metaphors for love, erotic desire and sex employed here by a hagiographer of Late Antiquity originates in the iconography of Eros which appears in ancient Greek literature (Thornton 1997). A similar iconography can also be found in Byzantine erotic literature which was produced later than the Life of Taïsia (Agapitos 1999; Cupane 2000; Nilsson 2001).⁶

⁶ I am referring to: 1) literary texts dealing with the subject matter of love, such as the poetry of Paul Silentiarios (sixth century) and the progymnasmata of Nikephoros Basilakes (twelfth century), and 2) the learned and vernacular love romances of the twelfth century and on.

THE SINFUL BODY FROM A MALE CHARACTER'S PERSPECTIVE

■ Pelagia's Life appears the following scene:

When they were seated, the bishops questioned Lord Nonnos [...] to gain benefit from him. While the Holy Spirit was talking through his lips for the benefit and the salvation of all the listeners, behold, suddenly the foremost among the actresses of Antioch passed by. She was also the first among the dancers in the theatre-chorus. [...]

And a great display of youths and maidens wearing costly clothing and golden necklaces was with her and some [youths and maidens] were going before her, whereas the others were following her. The ornaments and the adornments covering her were so many that the citizens could never come to the end of them. When she passed by, she filled all the air with the sweet smell of her perfumes.

As soon as the company of the holy bishops saw her passing among them in such a way with her face uncovered and such a display and shamelessness [...], they turned their faces away as if from a great sin.

But the holy man of God, Nonnos the bishop, was observing her carefully with the eyes of his mind, so as to turn and watch her after she had gone by. And afterwards, having turned his face, he laid it on his knees over the handkerchief he was holding in his holy hands and he filled his bosom all over with tears. And after he sighed deeply, he said to the bishops sitting with him: "Indeed, were you not delighted by her beauty?" And they, staying silent, said nothing to him in reply.

And after he had again laid his face on his knees and sighed deeply and beat his chest, he covered his hair-shirt with tears. Thereupon, having raised [his head], he said to the bishops: "Indeed, were you not delighted by her beauty?" Since they did not answer, the most holy bishop said: "Indeed, I was greatly delighted and I desired her beauty because God can take her and place her before his awful and tremendous seat of judgement, [and have her] condemn us and our episcopal office and our lives."

And he said once more to the bishops: "What do you think, beloved [brothers]? How many hours did she spend in her chamber cleaning, adorning, embellishing herself, putting on her make-up and looking in the mirror with great affection, so that she would not fail in her immediate aim by appearing ugly to her lovers? And she does all these things so that she might please human beings who exist today but will not exist tomorrow.

And we, even though we have an incorruptible and eternal bridal chamber in heaven and, in addition, have an immortal bridegroom Jesus, who graces with immortality those who beautify themselves in his orders. Even though we have a heavenly and rich dowry [...] and such a bride-

groom, neither do we beautify, nor adorn ourselves. We do not clean away filth from our wretched soul but we have left it to lie in negligence."

Having said these words, he took me with him and we went to the cell. And after throwing himself on the ground and hitting his face on the floor, he wept saying: "*O God, have mercy on me, the sinner* (Lk. 18.13) and unworthy because a prostitute's embellishment of one day defeated my soul's embellishment of all the years of my life. And with what face shall I look at you, God? With what words shall I justify myself before you? Or what shall I allege by way of excuse before you, who discerns my secrets? Woe to me the sinful, because I rub down the lintel of your spiritual altar without offering you the beauty of soul which you expect from me, oh, God.

And I stand before your awful and tremendous altar without being embellished according to your wish. Lord my God, you who transforms everything from the state of nonexistence into that of existence, as also since you deemed my lowliness worthy to serve you, despite my being worthless, do not cast me away from your heavenly altar. [Let] not the beautification of the prostitute condemn me before your awful and tremendous seat of judgment, because she has shown great zeal for the earth and the dust.

And I, despising your immortal altar, have offered myself to licentiousness and because of my carelessness I am bare of the spiritual world of your commands. For she promised to please people and she succeeded, whereas I promised to please you, God who loves mankind, and I failed. For this reason I am naked both before the earth and the heavens."

Καθημένων δὲ αὐτῶν, ἡρώτων οἱ ἐπίσκοποι τὸν κύριν Νόννον [...] ὠφελήθηται παρ' αὐτοῦ. Τοῦ δὲ ἁγίου πνεύματος λαλοῦντος διὰ τῶν χειλέων αὐτοῦ πρὸς ὠφέλειαν καὶ σωτηρίαν πάντων τῶν ἀκούοντων, ἰδοὺ ἄφνω παρέρχεται δι' ἡμῶν ἡ πρώτη τῶν μιμᾶδων Ἀντιοχείας· αὕτη δὲ ἦν καὶ ἡ πρώτη τῶν χορευτριῶν τοῦ ὀρχηστοῦ. [...]

καὶ πολλὴ φαντασία τῶν παιδῶν καὶ τῶν κορασίων τῶν μετ' αὐτῆς, φορούντων ἱματισμὸν πολυτελεῖ καὶ μανιὰκια χρυσᾶ, καὶ τοὺς μὲν αὐτῆς προτρέχοντας, τοὺς δὲ ἐπακολουθοῦντας. Τοῦ δὲ περικειμένου αὐτῇ κόσμου καὶ τοῦ ὠραϊσμοῦ οὐκ ἦν κόρος μάλιστα τοῖς δημοχαρέσιν ἀνθρώποις. Αὕτη διελθοῦσα δι' ἡμῶν τὸν ἀέρα ὅλον ἐπλήρωσε τῆς εὐωδίας τοῦ μόσχου καὶ τῶν μύρων τῶν ἐπ' αὐτῇ.

Ταύτην θεασάμενος ὁ χορὸς τῶν ἁγίων ἐπισκόπων οὕτως ἀνακακαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ διελθοῦσαν δι' αὐτῶν καὶ μετὰ τοιαύτης φαντασίας καὶ ἀναιδείας [...] ἀπέστρεψαν τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν ὡς ἀπὸ ἀμαρτίας μεγάλης.

Ὁ δὲ ἅγιος τοῦ Θεοῦ Νόννος ὁ ἐπίσκοπος τοῖς τῆς διανοίας ὀφθαλμοῖς ἀκριβῶς αὐτῇ προσέσχευε, ὥστε καὶ μετὰ τὸ παρελθεῖν αὐτὴν στραφῆναι καὶ τηρεῖν αὐτήν. Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα στρέψας τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἔθηκεν ἐπὶ τῶν γονάτων αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ἐγχειρίδιον ὃ ἐκράτει ἐν ταῖς ἀγίαις αὐτοῦ χερσίν

καὶ ὅλον τὸν κόλπον αὐτοῦ ἐπλήρωσεν τῶν δακρύων. Καὶ στενάξας μέγα λέγει τοῖς συγκαθημένοις αὐτῷ ἐπισκόποις: "Ὀντως ὑμεῖς οὐκ ἐτέρφθητε τοῦ κάλλους αὐτῆς;" Οἱ δὲ σιωπῇ ἀσκήσαντες οὐδὲν αὐτῷ ἀπεκρίθησαν.

Καὶ πάλιν θεὸς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν γονάτων καὶ μέγα στενάξας καὶ τὸ στῆθος αὐτοῦ τύψας ὅλον τὸ τρίχινον αὐτοῦ ἐπλήρωσεν τῶν δακρύων. Ἐπειτα ἀνανεῦσας λέγει τοῖς ἐπισκόποις: "Ὀντως ὑμεῖς οὐκ ἐτέρφθητε τοῦ κάλλους αὐτῆς;" Τῶν δὲ μὴ ἀποκρινομένων εἶπεν ὁ ἁγιώτατος ἐπίσκοπος: "Ὀντως ἐγὼ πάννυ ἐτέρφθην καὶ ἡράσθην τοῦ κάλλους αὐτῆς, ὅτι ταύτην ἔχει ὁ Θεὸς προσλαβέσθαι καὶ στῆσαι ἐνώπιον τοῦ φρικτοῦ καὶ φοβεροῦ βήματος αὐτοῦ κατακρίνουσαν ἡμᾶς καὶ τὴν ἐπισκοπὴν ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν βίον ἡμῶν."

Καὶ λέγει πάλιν τοῖς ἐπισκόποις: "Ὡς νομίζετε, ἀγαπητοί, πόσας ὥρας ἐποίησεν αὕτη ἐν τῷ κοιτῶνι αὐτῆς σμηχομένη, κοσμουμένη, ὠραῖζομένη, χριομένη καὶ μετὰ πολλῆς φιλοστοργίας ἐσοπτριζομένη, ἵνα μὴ τοῦ προκειμένου σκοποῦ ἀποτύχῃ καὶ ἄμορφος φανῇ τοῖς ἐαυτῆς ἐρασταῖς. Καὶ ταῦτα ἐποίησεν ἵνα ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσῃ τοῖς σήμερον οὖσι καὶ αὔριον οὐκ οὔσιν.

Καὶ ἡμεῖς ἔχοντες παστὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς ἀκατάλυτον καὶ μένοντα διὰ παντός, ἔτι δὲ καὶ νυμφίον Ἰησοῦν ἀθάνατον ἀθανασίαν χαριζόμενον τοῖς καλλωπιζομένοις τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ, προῖκα ἔχοντες ἐπουράνιον καὶ πλουσίαν [...] καὶ τοιοῦτον νυμφίον ἔχοντες, οὔτε καλλωπίζομεν ἑαυτοὺς οὔτε κοσμούμεθα οὔτε ἀποσμήχομεν τὸν ῥύπον ἀπὸ τῆς ἀθλίας ἡμῶν ψυχῆς, ἀλλ' ἐάσαμεν αὐτὴν ἐν ἀμελείᾳ κατακεῖσθαι."

Ταῦτα εἰπὼν παρέλαβέν με καὶ ἀπῆλθομεν ἐν τῷ κελλίῳ. Καὶ ῥίψας ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἀποκρούων ἔκλαιε λέγων: "Ὁ Θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ καὶ ἀναξίῳ, ὅτι μιᾶς ἡμέρας καλλωπισμὸς πόρνης ἐνίκησεν τὸν καλλωπισμὸν τῆς ψυχῆς μου ὅλων τῶν ἐτῶν τοῦ βίου μου. Καὶ ποίῳ προσώπῳ ἀτενίσω σοι, ὁ Θεός; ποίοις δὲ λόγοις δικαιοθῶ ἐνώπιόν σου; ἢ τί προφασίσομαι ἐνώπιόν σου τοῦ θεωροῦντος τὰ κρυπτὰ μου; Οὐαί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ, ὅτι τὴν φλιάν τοῦ νοεροῦ σου θυσιαστηρίου κατατρίβω μὴ προσφέρων σοι κάλλος ψυχῆς οἷον ἐπιζητεῖς παρ' ἐμοῦ, ὁ Θεός·

καὶ τῇ φρικτῇ καὶ φοβερᾷ σου τραπέζῃ παρίσταμαι μὴ κεκαλλωπισμένος πρὸς τὸ θέλημά σου· κύριε ὁ Θεός μου, ὁ ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι παραγαγὼν τὰ πάντα μεθ' ὧν καὶ τὴν ἐμὴν ταπεινώσιν καὶ ἀνάξιόν με ὄντα καταξιάσας δουλεύειν σοι, μὴ με ἀπορρίψῃς ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ σου θυσιαστηρίου μὴ με κατακρίνῃ ὁ καλλωπισμὸς τῆς πόρνης ἐνώπιον τοῦ φρικτοῦ καὶ φοβεροῦ σου βήματος, ὅτι αὕτη διὰ γῆν καὶ σποδὸν πολλὴν σπουδῇ ἐχρῆσάτο.

κἀγὼ τοῦ ἀθανάτου θυσιαστηρίου καταφρονῶν εἰς ἀσέλγειαν ἑμαυτὸν ἐξέδωκα καὶ διὰ τὴν ῥαθυμίαν μου γυμνός εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ κόσμου τῶν ἐντολῶν σου. Ἐκείνη γὰρ ἀνθρώποις ἐπηγγείλατο ἀρέσαι καὶ ἡλήθευσεν· ἐγὼ δὲ σοὶ τῷ φιλανθρώπῳ Θεῷ ἐπηγγειλάμην ἀρέσαι καὶ ἐφυσάμην· διὰ τοῦτο γυμνός εἰμι καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ ἐν οὐρανοῖς." (VPel chs.4-13.20-91)

While a company of bishops listens to the beneficial speech of the bishop Nonnos, its spiritual leader, another company of a secular and extremely spectacular character, the leader of which is a prostitute called Pelagia,⁷ passes arrogantly through the first company and disturbs it. Nonnos is so fascinated by the sight of this spectacularly beautiful woman that he interrupts his speech, the source of which, according to the hagiographer is the Holy Spirit and instead observes carefully the woman passing by. As for his companions, they refuse to look at her and turn their faces away. For a while, and because of this unexpected and sudden spectacle, Nonnos ceases to be the centre of attention; his role as such is overtaken by Pelagia. Due to his desire to see Pelagia as accurately as possible, Nonnos prolongs the interruption of his speech, which in the end remains unfinished as he keeps watching the woman while she is moving away. Pelagia herself is not aware of this scene, as we understand later from the development of the narrative and from the fact that she does not seem to notice that she and her parade cause functional problems to a gathering of bishops.

Pelagia's costume and general appearance are the means through which her occupation and identity are defined. Upon seeing her, the bishops and deacon James are able to say who she is, even though they do not know her name. She is both an actress and a dancer and therefore a prostitute.⁸ As a prostitute, Pelagia cannot belong to the Christian community. In the bishops' eyes, Pelagia is a woman who engages in "evil deeds", as the deacon James describes her (*VPel* ch.18.131). Given that she despises Christ—her sinful life testifies to this—she is by definition the disciple of the Devil. That is one of the two reasons for which the bishops, except Nonnos, avoid looking at Pelagia, because they see in her the embodiment of their worst enemy, Satan. The second reason derives from their fear of committing a sin through sight: they are afraid that if they set eyes on her they might be captivated by her charms and feel desire for her. As we have seen so far, this is what happens to the men who look at Eudokia and Taïsia.

⁷ Her name is not mentioned in the above quoted passage. It is given much later in the narrative, when Pelagia is about to be baptised (*VPel* ch.30.213–214).

⁸ In early Byzantine society, women whose occupation was related to public spectacles and entertainments such as dancing and singing were prostitutes (Leontsini 1989).

The Lives of holy prostitutes are the only examples of female hagiographic texts in which the central heroine's beauty acquires such a negative meaning: here the bishops treat Pelagia's beauty as a visual pollution. The beauty of Eudokia and Taïsia is despised by their hagiographers because, as we have seen, they destroy many men both financially and spiritually. In contrast, the natural beauty of the heroines undertaking other roles of sanctity is always exalted by the hagiographers. Obviously the prostitute's beauty cannot be praised because it is not devoted to the life in Christ but instead to earthly pleasures. On the other hand, the beauty of holy women, such as the martyrs, derives from their virginity offered to Christ (cf. Chapter 1), a female attribute which the prostitutes have "shamelessly" destroyed. Mary the Egyptian says to Zosimas, referring to her virginity: "I am ashamed to think about how I first destroyed my own virginity" (tr. Kouli 1996: 80; καὶ ὅπως πρὶν τὴν ἀρχὴν, τὴν ἐμαυτῆς παρθενίαν διέφθορα, [...] αἰσχύνομαι ἐννοεῖν. *VMarAeg* ch.18). The beauty of a prostitute, being a commodity, as the hagiographer of Taïsia puts it ("She sold her beauty to the ones who wanted to sleep with her in a shameful way." *VTaes* p.88.1–2), ceases to be delightful and becomes its negative opposite: unsightly and corrupt. However, the bishop Nonnos does not fail to appreciate Pelagia's beauty, as the passage quoted above from Pelagia's Life indicates.

Nonnos avoids the danger of sinning through sight because, in contrast to the other bishops, he has the capacity not to look at Pelagia but through her. This way of seeing enables him to invest Pelagia's way of life with a new significance. Unlike his fellow bishops, he does not despise her but sees in her a person whose way of life could function as a means of edification even for the holiest bishop. Pelagia's arrival operates as an epiphany for Nonnos, offering him the occasion to look inside himself and interpret his own life in relation to that of Pelagia. Pelagia shows Nonnos how devoted one should be to the way of life one chooses. Nonnos can understand, through Pelagia's appearance, that she takes many hours every day in order to prepare herself, and more precisely her body, for her work. He perceives this as a sign of her high zeal for her occupation. This very reality with which Nonnos is confronted impresses him and at the same time scares him, as he realises that a prostitute is more faithful to her occupation than he is devoted to his God. Thus, Nonnos' whole world falls apart. All of a sudden, Nonnos comes to understand that what he thought until now about himself and his rela-

tion to God does not correspond to reality. This discovery of his is so dreadful that he cannot help weeping.

After regaining his self-control, Nonnos shares his shocking experience with his companions. He asks them whether they are delighted by Pelagia's beauty. Since they do not reply, he goes on to offer them his own reading of Pelagia's body and way of life. Now Nonnos engages in a new edifying speech, which becomes a substitute for the first one that had been interrupted and forgotten because of Pelagia's brief appearance. Nonnos uses Pelagia's great devotion to her body as an example of showing to the bishops how they should treat their souls. According to Nonnos, Pelagia's beautiful body, which is looked after to the highest degree possible, is a metaphor of the ideal state of the soul.⁹ A Christian's soul should be looked after so intensively and carefully that it will end up possessing the beauty which Pelagia's body has.

When he finishes his edifying speech on Pelagia, Nonnos has to leave the street and the bishops. He needs to be in a private place where he can better express his sorrow and confess his sin, which is his incompetence in serving God to the same degree that a prostitute serves her lovers. In his cell, he performs his repentance which has some parallels with the repentance performed before him by Pelagia later in the narrative.¹⁰ Nonnos falls to the ground and confesses his sin weeping. He asks God to forgive him and not to exclude him from His Kingdom.

As soon as they saw Pelagia, Nonnos' fellow bishops treated her as an evil and dangerous person who should be despised and excluded from society. Nevertheless, as Nonnos' interpretation of Pelagia's sinful self/body illustrates, Pelagia's presence can help the bishops not only to understand and define themselves, but also to achieve higher levels of spirituality. That the Life of a female penitent enables the monks to see their own lives and sins is also implied by the hagiographer of the adulteress Theodora of Alexandria: "And whoever listens to her life, my brothers, will beat his chest, after having been reminded of his own sins" (καὶ εἴ τις ἀκούσει τὸν βίον αὐτῆς, ἀδελφοί, τύπτουσι (sic) τὰ στήθη αὐτῶν μεμνημένοι τῶν ἰδίων ἁμαρτιῶν. *VTheodAl* p.25).

⁹ The employment of the image of the prostitute in order to present a picture of the ideal state of the soul is a frequent theme in monastic literature (Ward 1985 and 1987: 60–61).

¹⁰ See further below (pp. 80–82).

The moral lesson given by Nonnos' edifying speech on Pelagia is what is presented by the hagiographers to be the main aim of their texts. It is on this very moral lesson that these texts base their existence, otherwise the presentation of a prostitute's sexual life before communities of monks cannot be justified, as has been stated above. For this reason the hagiographers employ two narrative devices that allow them to emphasise the edifying character of their texts.

The first device is to introduce into the narrative a male character who plays a vital role in the heroines' lives and afterlives. The heroines' transition from one stage to another is marked by the appearance of a man. With the exception of Mary the Egyptian, as we will see, it is always a man who contributes to the conversion of the sinful heroines (Germanos, Serapios, Nonnos). Additionally, the first person who witnesses the heroines' shift from the penitent to the holy self and makes it known to the world is again a man (Zosimas, James). The male characters' encounter with the heroines is not only beneficial for the heroines but also for the male characters themselves. Even though these men already possess deep spirituality when they meet the heroines, they become even "better" on a spiritual level, either because they help the heroines to repent or because they encounter the heroines and their didactic stories. Along with the example of Nonnos, that of the monk Zosimas from the Life of Mary of Egypt should also be mentioned. Zosimas believes that he has acquired all existing spiritual wisdom and that there is nothing left for him to learn (*VMarAeg* ch.3). However, he lacks the experience of repentance with which he is provided through Mary's story. That it is always a pious monk and not a saintly nun who benefits a prostitute and who is benefited by her may be explained by the male perspective of the holy prostitutes' Lives. As already stated, they were written by men for men. The male heroes are the figures with whom the male hagiographers and their initial male audiences could identify.

The second narrative device employed by the hagiographers in order to stress the edifying character of their texts and to explain how the information about the holy women reached them, is their remarkable technique of presenting the heroines' accounts or parts of them, as stories appearing in a larger framework and being continuously narrated and transmitted from the one who knows them to the others who should also experience them (cf. Flusin 2004: 67–71). Mary of Egypt is presented telling her story to Zosimas. Zosimas in turn narrates to his fellow monks

both Mary's story and his own about his religious career and encounter with Mary. Zosimas' fellow monks go on to recite Mary's and Zosimas' stories to other monks. Both stories pass orally from one generation of monks to the other for edification until someone undertakes to write them down in a single text (*VMarAeg* ch.41). In Pelagia's Life, James is presented telling his fellow monks both the story of Nonnos' encounter with Pelagia and the story of his own meeting with the heroine for edification:

It seemed good to me, the sinful James the deacon, to write to you, spiritual brothers, about a sign, or rather a wonder that happened in our times, so that by hearing it you may receive great benefit.

Τὸ γινόμενον σημεῖον, μᾶλλον δὲ θαῦμα ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἡμῶν ἔδοξεν ἐμοὶ τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ Ἰακώβῳ διακόνῳ γράψαι ὑμῖν τοῖς πνευματικοῖς ἀδελφοῖς, ὥς ἂν τοῦτο ἀκούσαντες καὶ πολλῆς κατὰ ψυχὴν ὠφελείας, τυχόντες. (*VPel* ch.1.1–4)

The story of Pelagia's life related by deacon James before his spiritual brothers is in turn read loud to other monastic audiences for their own edification. Moreover, the Lives of holy prostitutes function also as consolatory discourses, as the narrator of Taïsia's Life says in the prologue of the text:

My true brothers and true servants of Christ the King, bend your ears for a while to listen to a divine and beneficial story. For I want to tell you about the marvellous, joyous and beneficial repentance which Taïsia, the servant of Christ, commenced and carried out and was thus glorified greatly. The story is indeed beneficial and consolatory for those who fall into the filth of sin and want to repent.

Ἀδελφοί μου γνήσιοι καὶ Χριστοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως δοῦλοι ἀληθινοί, κλῖνατε ὑμῶν τὰς ἀκοὰς πρὸς βραχὺ εἰς ἀκρόασιν θεῖαν καὶ ψυχωφελῇ. Βούλομαι γὰρ διηγήσασθαι ὑμῖν τὴν θαυμαστὴν καὶ φαιδρὰν καὶ ὠφέλιμον μετάνοιαν, ἣν ἀρξαμένη καὶ τελέσασα ἡ τοῦ Χριστοῦ δούλη Ταῖσία ἐδοξάσθη πάνυ. Καὶ τοῖς πεσοῦσι τῷ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ῥύπῳ καὶ θέλουσι μετανοῆσαι, ὠφέλιμος ὁ λόγος καὶ παρακλητικός. (*VTaes* p.86.1–11)

This passage suggests that if such a serious sinner as Taïsia the prostitute can be granted salvation, then everybody can be saved provided that he/she repents and adopts a life in Christ. For, as the example of the holy prostitute shows, "God rewards greatly those who take refuge in Him"

ὁ θεὸς δέ, ὁ μεγάλα ἀμειβόμενος τοὺς εἰς αὐτὸν καταφεύγοντας. (*VMarAeg* ch.41).

THE SINFUL BODY FROM THE CENTRAL HEROINE'S PERSPECTIVE

The most detailed account of a prostitute's sexual activities and adventures is given in the Life of Mary of Egypt, where Mary portrays her sinful self/body after having been implored by the monk Zosimas to reveal to him everything concerning herself and her life. When Mary talks about her life as a prostitute, she is a different person; she therefore speaks of a former identity seen through the lenses of a new identity. In her self-narration, Mary's "I" is divided into an "I" of the past and an "I" of the present, differing from each other bodily, morally and mentally. The temporal distance between the past and the present self of Mary amounts to forty-seven years. During her first seventeen years in the desert, Mary, supported by her faith in Christ's Mother, gradually kills a self preoccupied with all possible ways that could lead to bodily pleasures. For instance, Mary had the idea to enter a ship travelling to the Holy Land in order to have intercourse with the travellers (*VMarAeg* ch.20).

The annihilation of Mary's identity as a prostitute takes almost as long as her identity as such lasted. She says to Zosimas: "For more than seventeen years—please forgive me—I was a public temptation to licentiousness" (tr. Kouli 1996: 80; δέκα ἑπτὰ καὶ πρὸς ἑνιαντούς, συγχώρησον, διετέλεσα δημόσιον προκειμένη τῆς ἀσωτίας ὑπέκκαυμα. *VMarAeg* ch.18). Having distanced herself from Mary the prostitute, the transformed Mary criticises her former self, of which she is now ashamed:

I am ashamed, my father, to describe for you my shameful actions. Forgive me in the name of the Lord. But since you have seen my bare body, I shall lay bare to you also my deeds, so that you may know with what great shame and humiliation my soul is filled. (tr. Kouli 1996: 80)

Αἰσχύνομαι, ἀββᾶ μου, εἰπεῖν σοὶ τὴν αἰσχύνην τῶν ἔργων μου, συγχώρησόν μοι διὰ τὸν Κύριον· πλὴν ἐπεὶ περ γυμνὸν μου τὸ σῶμα τεθέασαι, ἀπογυμνώσω σοὶ καὶ τὰς πράξεις μου, ἵνα γνῶς πόσης αἰσχύνης καὶ ἐντροπῆς ἡ ψυχὴ μου πεπλήρωται. (*VMarAeg* ch.17)

Despite her shame for her former life, Mary goes on to relate it to Zosimas. Her narration operates as the confession she feels obliged to make before dying. Her confession appears necessary for one more reason: it has to take place before she receives the Holy Communion which

Zosimas promises to bring her a year later.

Mary refers first to her life as a prostitute and then to her life as a penitent. Through remembering and narrating, she returns to the previous situations of her life. Whereas she previously gave her body to many men and then as a penitent to no living creature, she now offers her story to a holy man and through him to other men, Zosimas' fellow monks, for edification. While a prostitute and a penitent, Mary does not yet have a voice. It is only when she acquires the state of holiness that she is allowed to speak and become the protagonist of a pious narrative.

The Repentant Body

The heroines' lives as prostitutes are destined to come to an end and be replaced by their lives as penitents. The sinful self is a stage in the heroines' lives which has to be experienced in order to be denied for a pious life. In other words, the sinful self is the prerequisite for the repentant self: one has to experience sin in order to be able to renounce it and repent it. It is the denial of a way of life based on bodily pleasures that allows the heroines to acquire spirituality and thus ascend to holiness. The heroines fall through their bodies and, at the same time, are saved through them.

The heroines' turn from one extreme to the opposite presupposes the sudden appearance of a divine power which forces this change because, as formulated in the texts, God "does not desire the death of the sinner" (*VMarAeg* ch.21; cf. Ezek. 33.11). This drastic alteration in the heroines' lives has its models in the Bible. Saul/Paul is one of them. On his way to Damascus where he is going in order to arrest Christians, Saul falls to the ground and loses his sight after a light from the sky has blinded him. When Saul recovers his sight, he acquires a new identity: he becomes a Christian (Acts 9.1–19).

The imagery of the light,¹¹ being used as a metaphor for Saul's encounter with Christian truth, is also employed by the hagiographer of Eudokia. Like Saul, and in contrast to the other heroines discussed here, Eudokia is not a Christian.¹² The light comes to enlighten Eudokia, the Samaritan,

¹¹ For light and its function in the Bible, see Aalen 1951; Langer 1985; Malmede 1986; Schwankl 1995.

¹² Mary the Egyptian and Taïsia are Christians. As for Pelagia, she is a catechumen.

and make her "see" not only the truth of Christ but also that of her own life; she thus obtains a self-knowledge she did not have before. She therefore converts to Christianity and gives up her life as a prostitute.

And then arrived the light and the time of her healing. For the good shepherd looked for the lost sheep, the good potter acknowledged the work of his own creation, the true housekeeper went to examine the fruits of the vineyard that were about to be plundered by the enemy, the master of the heavenly treasures deemed worthy the transformation of earthly wealth into eternal treasures. [...] He summoned the Samaritan to his own perfect hope. For God's mercy shone forth and sent away the devil, who had given her riches, with his hopes frustrated, having suffered his ill luck and being deprived of her beauty.

Καὶ λοιπὸν ἔφθασε φῶς, καὶ ὁ καιρὸς τῆς ἰατρείας πρὸς αὐτήν. Ὁ ποιμὴν γὰρ ὁ καλὸς τὸ ἀπολωλὸς πρόβατον ἐπεζήτει, ὁ ἀγαθὸς κεραμεὺς τῆς ἰδίας πλαστοουργίας τὸ ἔργον ἐπέγνων, ὁ γνήσιος οἰκονόμος τοὺς καρποὺς τοῦ ἀμπελώνος μέλλοντας διαρπάξεσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐχθροῦ ἐπεσκέψατο, ὁ τῶν ἐπουρανίων θησαυρῶν δεσποτῶν τὸν ἐπίγειον πλοῦτον εἰς αἰώνιους θησαυροὺς μεταγαγεῖν κατηξίωσεν. [...] Σαμαρεΐτιδα εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ τελείαν ἐλπίδα προσεκάλεσατο. Τὸ γὰρ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ προλάμπον, τῶν προσδοκωμένων ἐλπίδων κενὸν ἀπέπεμψε τὸν ταύτης πλουτοδότην διάβολον, τὴν ἀτυχίαν ὑπομείναντα, καὶ στερηθέντα τοῦ ταύτης κάλλους. (*VEud* ch.2)

This passage appears immediately after the presentation of Eudokia's sinful self/body. At this point, the hagiographer interrupts the flow of narration in order to make a comment, part of which is the cited passage. The function of this comment is twofold: on one hand, it operates as a *prolepsis* which prepares the reader or the listener of the text for the heroine's subsequent transformation from a disciple of the Devil into a disciple of God; on the other, it gives the divine source of such a transformation. God does not fail to save Eudokia from her sins by sending his light, which approaches her in the form of a monk's preaching. In the case of Pelagia, it is also the preaching of a holy man (Nonnos) that makes her realise the sinfulness of her life:

Through the arrangement of God who loves mankind, also the [...] woman we have been talking about came [to the church]. It was a strange and marvellous [thing] that she, despite being a catechumen, had never considered her sins or entered the church for a blessing. On hearing then the holy [bishop Nonnos] talking, she was led to the fear of God to such a high degree that, despairing of herself, she wept and there was no restraint to the flood of her tears.

Κατ' οἰκονομίαν δὲ τοῦ φιλανθρώπου Θεοῦ συνέρχεται καὶ [...] αὕτη γυνή, περὶ ἧς ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος. Καὶ τὸ ξένον τοῦτο καὶ θαυμαστόν, ὅτι οὐσα κατηχουμένη καὶ μηδέποτε ἔννοιαν λαβοῦσα τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῆς ἢ εἰσελθοῦσα εἰς ἐκκλησίαν ποτὲ εὐχῆς χάριν, αὕτη τοίνυν τῷ ἁγίῳ ὁμιλοῦντι οὕτως κατηνύγει εἰς τὸν φόβον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὥστε ἀπογνοῦσα ἑαυτῆς ἔκλαιεν, καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τῶν δακρῶν αὐτῆς οὐκ ἦν ἀναχαιτισμός. (*VPel* ch.18.130–136)

After becoming conscious of her sinful self, Pelagia feels obliged to confess her sins to Nonnos and to be baptised by him. Nonnos agrees to meet her only if he is accompanied by his fellow bishops and other churchmen. The scene in which Pelagia performs her penitence has overt parallels with the scene examined earlier where Pelagia, without realising it, exposes her sinful self/body before the bishops.

When she came where they were gathered, she threw herself on the ground and seized the feet of the most holy bishop Nonnos crying heavily so that the feet of the holy man were washed by her many tears. She was drying them with her hair; moreover, having picked up dust from the ground, she threw it onto her head and [...] was saying to the holy man with a cry: "I beg you, my lord, have mercy on me the sinner; imitate your master Jesus Christ and pour out on me your goodness. Do not refuse to make me, the unworthy one, a Christian [...]."

While she was saying these words with distress in her heart and many tears, all the bishops and the priests, who happened to be there, wept many tears on account of such a sudden and marvellous change so that many, having been astonished, said with surprise that they had never seen such zeal and wholehearted faith in a prostitute. The servant of God managed with difficulty to convince her to get up from his feet; he then said to her: "The canons of ecclesiastical order forbid the baptism of a prostitute without a guarantor lest she relapse back to her old ways."

When she heard these words, she threw herself again to the ground and seized his feet saying with many tears: "You will give account to God for me and he will register against you my wicked deeds if you refuse to baptise me, the impious. You will not find a place next to God if you do not make me immediately a stranger to my deeds and my evil life. You will deny your God, if you do not lead me today as a bride to Christ."

Τῆς δὲ ἐλθούσης ὅπου ἦσαν συνηγμένοι, ῥίπτει ἑαυτὴν ἐπὶ τὸ ἔδαφος καὶ ἐπιλαμβάνεται τῶν ποδῶν τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου ἐπισκόπου Νόννου κλαίονσα σφοδρῶς, ὥστε ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν αὐτῆς δακρῶν τοὺς πόδας τοῦ ἁγίου πλύνεσθαι ἐξέμασεν δὲ αὐτοὺς ταῖς θριζὶν αὐτῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς αἶρουνσα τῇ κεφαλῇ αὐτῆς ἐπέβαλεν καὶ μετὰ κραυγῆς [...] πρὸς τὸν ἅγιον

ἐβόα: "Δέομαί σου, δέσποτα, ἐλέησόν με τὴν ἁμαρτωλὸν· μίμησαι σου τὸν καθηγητὴν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ ἔκχεον ἐπ' ἐμὲ τὴν χρηστότητά σου. Μὴ ἀπαξιώσης με τὴν ἀνάξιον ποιῆσαι χριστιανὴν [...]."

Ταῦτα αὐτῆς ἐκ συνοχῆς καρδίας καὶ <διὰ> δακρῶν πολλῶν λεγούσης, οἱ συνελθόντες ἐπίσκοποι πάντες καὶ οἱ κληρικοὶ ἐξεχέαμεν δάκρυα πολλά ἐπὶ τῇ τοιαύτῃ ἀθρόα καὶ θαυμασίᾳ μεταβολῇ ὥστε πολλοὺς θαυμάζοντας μετ' ἐκπλήξεως λέγειν μηδέποτε πόθον τοιοῦτον καὶ πίστιν ὁλόψυχον πόρνης ἑωρακέναι. Μόλις δὲ αὐτὴν ἴσχυσεν πείσαι ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ δοῦλος ἀναστῆναι ἀπὸ τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτῇ: "Οἱ κανόνες τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς λειτουργίας περιέχουσιν μὴ βαπτίζειν ἡμᾶς πόρνην χωρὶς ἐγγυητῶν, ἵνα μὴ πάλιν ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς εὑρεθῇ."

Καὶ ὅμα τῷ ἀκοῦσαι αὐτὴν τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ῥίπτει πάλιν ἑαυτὴν εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος καὶ ἐπιλαμβάνεται τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ λέγουσα μετὰ πολλῶν δακρῶν: "Λόγον ἀποδώσεις ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν καὶ σοὶ ἐπιγράψει τὰς πονηράς μου πράξεις, ἐὰν ὑπερῶ τοῦ φωτισθῆναί με τὴν ἄσεβῃ· καὶ μὴ εὐρήσεις μερίδα παρὰ κυρίου, ἐὰν μὴ ἄρτι ποιήσης με ἁλλοτρίαν τῶν ἔργων μου καὶ τοῦ πεφασισμένου μου βίου· ἀρνήσει τὸν Θεὸν σου ἐὰν μὴ σήμερόν με προσαγάγῃς νύμφην Χριστῷ." (*VPel* chs.24–26.165–191)

Here Pelagia presents herself completely differently from the way in which she appears before the bishops at the beginning of her Life. Her initial arrogance and self-esteem are now replaced by her humility and shame. In both cases her attitude towards herself is manifested through the appearance of her body, its position and movements. In the first case, she is seated prominently riding on a donkey, thus her body is literally to be found in a higher position than the bishops' bodies being seated on the ground. She is spectacularly dressed and she has both her face and head uncovered. In the second case, Pelagia throws herself to the ground and her head is to be found on the same level as the bishops' feet. Her face looks at Nonnos' feet. Her uncovered head is symbolically covered by the dust she throws on it. This time she is lamenting, showing her humility and repentance. She dries her tears away from Nonnos' feet with her hair, a scene which recalls the repentance of Mary Magdalene before Christ (Lk. 7.37–38).

The members of the audience during the two performances of Pelagia can be divided into two categories according to their reactions. These reactions are determined by the influence which Pelagia's behaviour has on the spectators in each case. The first category of audience consists of Nonnos and the second category consists of the bishops, the narrator and the other churchmen who happen to be present during Pelagia's sec-

ond appearance. Like Pelagia's two contradictory performances, the members of the two categories of her audiences also appear to have antithetical reactions. In the first case, as we have seen, the bishops avoid seeing Pelagia, whereas Nonnos does not let her leave his sight until she disappears. In the second case, these very same bishops watch Pelagia's performance carefully. They do not despise her, as they do during her first appearance. On the contrary, they admire her for her drastic conversion and they are moved by her tears to such a high degree that they also begin crying.

As for Nonnos, during Pelagia's first appearance, he admires her for her beauty and devotion to her lovers. His realisation that his soul is not as beautiful as Pelagia's body and that he is not devoted to God to the same degree that Pelagia is devoted to her lovers makes him cry. During Pelagia's second appearance, Nonnos is a completely different person. This time he behaves as the bishop who has to act according to ecclesiastical law. Not only is he not moved by Pelagia's conversion, he is also reluctant to baptise her. Nonnos changes his mind and goes on to baptise Pelagia after she has thrown herself before his feet for a second time and reminded him of the sin to which a bishop like him falls if he does not lead her to salvation.¹³

In contrast to Eudokia, Pelagia and Taïsia, who are guided by the voice of a man who later becomes their spiritual father, Mary of Egypt is led to her new way of life as a penitent by a bodiless voice. This voice reaches her after the intervention of the Virgin from whom Mary asks protection and guidance. Unlike the other three heroines, Mary comes to realise her sinful life not by hearing the word of God preached by a male religious authority, but by being prevented from seeing His Mysteries (τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰ μυστήρια, *VMarAeg* ch.24).

The sinful self of Mary, who until the moment she arrives at the church of Constantine on Golgotha, "wanders around hunting after the souls of young men" (περιῆειν ψυχὰς νέων ἀγρεύουσα, *VMarAeg* ch.22), is prohibited by a divine power from entering the house of God and thus from seeing the relic of the Holy Cross. What Mary is deemed unworthy of looking at is seen by all the other people she sees entering the church. In fact, Mary's eyes are blind as far as their ability to see the

Holy Cross is concerned. She has to be deprived of her ability to see the Holy Cross in order to be able to see God and his power with the "eyes of her heart" (τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τῆς καρδίας μου, *VMarAeg* ch.23), as Mary herself puts it.

The blindness of Mary's sinful self is replaced by the ability to see that her repentant self acquires. After being informed by a divine voice that her way of life is the reason why she cannot enter the church, Mary feels guilty. Her lamentation and beating of her breasts that follow constitute signs of her penitence. It is in this very moment of regret that Mary's blindness disappears. Despite being in an emotional situation in which she is not expected to notice what is around her, Mary does catch a glimpse of an icon of the Virgin displayed above the place where she is standing, something she did not notice when she was calm.

The icon is the second instrument (the first being the voice) through which Mary is made to see herself as sinful. When Mary gazes at the icon, she confirms what she has heard from the voice about the "filth of her actions". She is led to make a comparison between herself and the female figure portrayed on the icon, who is her exact opposite:

Virgin Lady, [...] I know, I know well that it is neither decent, nor reasonable for me who is so filthy and utterly prodigal, to look upon Thy icon, Thou the ever-virginal, the chaste, Thou Who art pure and undefiled in body and soul. For it is right that I, the prodigal woman, should be hated and abhorred by Thou Who art pure. (tr. Kouli 1996: 83)

Παρθένε Δέσποινα, [...] οἶδα μέν, οἶδα ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν εὐπρεπὲς οὐδὲ εὐλογοντὴν οὕτως με ῥυπαρὰν οὖσαν, τὴν οὕτως πανάσωτον, εἰκόνα καθορᾶν σου τῆς Ἀειπαρθένου, σοῦ, τῆς ἀγνῆς, σοῦ τῆς σώμα καὶ ψυχὴν ἐχούσης καθαρὰν καὶ ἀμόλυντον· δίκαιον γάρ ἐστιν ἐμὲ τὴν ἄσωτον ὑπὸ τῆς σῆς καθαρότητος μισεῖσθαι τε καὶ βδελύττεσθαι. (*VMarAeg* ch.23)

The icon causes the emanation of language. While the divine voice that approached Mary earlier rendered her speechless, the Virgin's image makes her speak and present herself as sinful. Mary goes on to ask the Virgin to help her and allow her entry into the church. She promises to renounce the world and go wherever the Virgin instructs her. As soon as Mary expresses her desire to repent for her sinful life, she receives a strength that enables her to move and make her way to the entrance of the church. She eventually manages to enter the church and see the Holy Cross.

¹³ Cf. the monks in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* who even enter a brothel in order to save a prostitute from her sins (Ward 1987: 77–79), and the monk Serapios from the Life of Taïsia.

After the confession of their sins, the heroines undertake further penitential acts. The span of their lives in penitence varies from some days (Eudokia) to seventeen years (Mary of Egypt).¹⁴ Of course, their penitential acts are opposed to the acts they had previously performed while being prostitutes. They give away all the riches they had collected during their sinful lives. They change appearance: their expensive dresses are replaced by worthless ones and their valuable ornaments are removed. They leave behind their social lives. As we have seen, they used to be the centre of attraction. Their sinful desire to be visible requires now the ordeal of invisibility: they remove themselves from society completely, becoming "dead" to the world. Being enclosed in claustrophobic cells (Eudokia, Pelagia, Taïsia) or isolated in the desert (Mary of Egypt), the heroines are condemned to silence. The spiritual father of Taïsia advises her even to avoid praying and addressing God:

She again told him: "How do you command me to pray? For I fear that I am unworthy." He answered her: "I too do know that you are unworthy to call the name of the Lord or to stretch your hands in prayer to him, for your lips are dirty and your hands impure; you should, therefore, sit only in silence, looking attentively towards the east saying in your heart nothing but the following: 'You, who have created me, have mercy on me, I have sinned, be gracious to me'."

Πάλιν λέγει πρὸς αὐτόν: Πῶς κελεύεις με εὐχεσθαι; φοβοῦμαι γὰρ ὅτι ἀναξία εἰμί. Λέγει αὐτῇ: Καγὼ οἶδα ὅτι ἀναξία εἶ ὀνομάσαι τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου, ἢ ἀπλῶσαι τὰς χεῖρας σου εἰς δέησιν αὐτοῦ, διότι τὰ χεῖλη σου ῥυπαρά εἰσι, καὶ αἱ χεῖρές σου ἀναγναὶ ὑπάρχουσι, διὸ σιγῇ μόνον καθέξου, προσέχουσα κατὰ ἀνατολὰς καὶ μηδὲν ἄλλο λέγε ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου, ἢ τοῦτο: 'Ὁ πλάσας με, ἐλέησόν με, ἥμαρτον, ἰλάσθητί μοι. (*VTaes* p.100.14–20, p.102.1–3)

It is during the time of their absolute isolation that the heroines seek to kill their sinful selves, which constitute obstacles to their salvation. They thus struggle against themselves by violating and forcing themselves to accept a new way of life. The destruction of their sinful selves is achieved through annihilating their bodily needs and their memories concerning their voluptuous carnal experiences. Their memories, which come to them as temptations, are the strongest enemies of their penitent lives, as becomes obvious through Mary's experience:

¹⁴ Pelagia's and Taïsia's penance last for three years respectively.

Then Zosimas asked, "And did you live in this way for so many years without distress and without being disturbed by the sudden change in your way of life?" The woman answered, "Now you ask me something, Father Zosimas, which I shudder even to speak about. For, if I recall now all those dangers I suffered patiently and those thoughts which terribly disturbed me, I am afraid they might strike me again." [...] She said to him, "Believe me, revered Father, for seventeen years I wandered in this desert struggling with those irrational desires, as if with wild beasts. [...] How can I describe to you, revered Father, those thoughts that were urging me again to fornication? Indeed, deep in my miserable heart a burning desire was kindled and set my whole [being] aflame and excited my desire for intercourse." (tr. Kouli 1996: 85–86)

Εἶπεν δὲ Ζωσιμᾶς· Καὶ οὕτως ἀπόνως παρήλθες τῶν τοσούτων ἐτῶν τὸ διάστημα, μηδὲν τῆς ἀθρόας γενομένης μεταβολῆς ταραττούσης σε; Ἀπεκρίθη ἡ γυνὴ· Πρᾶγμα με νῦν ἠρώτησας, ἀββᾶ Ζωσιμᾶ, ὅπερ φρίττω καὶ λέγουσα· ἔὰν γὰρ ἔλθω νῦν εἰς ἀνάμνησιν τῶν τοσούτων κινδύνων, ὥνπερ ὑπέμεινα, καὶ τῶν λογισμῶν τῶν δεινῶς ἐνοχλησάντων μοι, φοβοῦμαι μὴ πως καὶ αὖθις ὑπ' ἐκείνων βληθῇσωμαι. [...] Ἡ δὲ πρὸς αὐτόν· Πίστευσον, ἀββᾶ, δεκαεπτὰ ἔτη εἰς ταύτην περιήλθον τὴν ἔρημον, θηρσὶν ἀνημέροις ταῖς ἀλόγοις ἐπιθυμίαις πυκτεύουσα. [...] Τοὺς δὲ λογισμούς, τοὺς εἰς πορνείαν αὖθις ὠθοῦντάς με, πῶς σοι, ἀββᾶ, διηγῆσομαι; Πῦρ γὰρ ἔνδοθεν τῆς καρδίας μου τῆς ταλαίνης ἀνήπτετο, καὶ ὅλην δι' ὅλου ἐξέφλεγεν, καὶ πρὸς ἐπιθυμίαν ἀνηρέθιζε μίξεως. (*VMarAeg* chs.27–29)

Mary manages to wipe out the memories of her sinful life by covering them with more recent ones: those of her experience with the Virgin and the promise she gave before her icon that she would never return to her sinful life. Now that she talks about her repentant self, she has already undergone a second transformation: she resides in her holy self, to which we will now turn.

The Holy Body

By the time the total isolation of the heroines is interrupted by a pious man who enters the space they inhabit and breaks their silence, the heroines have already begun living their third life, the holy one. Their life in holiness, unlike their previous two lives, is unalterable and everlasting. The holy body, which they finally obtain, is either sexless or male-like. The heroines' female characteristics, which are their beauty and lovely bodily shape, disappear and are replaced by the features of a male

ascetic's body. This occurs because the female body, which led the heroines to sin and of which they are so much ashamed, has to be effaced. Thus Pelagia is considered to be a saintly eunuch because she looks like one:

I did not recognise her. How could I recognise the irresistible beauty that had faded away through the most excessive abstinence? Her eyes seemed like ravines to those who looked at her, and the joints of her lovely body could now be seen as a result of her excessive hardship and similarly the rest of her body. All of Jerusalem had a good opinion about her as if she were a eunuch; and no man [ever] suspected that she was a woman; nor did I realise such a thing. I received a blessing from her as if from a man who was a eunuch.

Ἐγὼ δὲ αὐτὴν οὐκ ἐγνώρισα. Πῶς γὰρ ἐδυνάμην γνωρίσαι τὸ ἀμήχανον κάλλος μαρνανθὲν ἀπὸ σφοδρωτάτης ἐγκρατείας; Οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῆς ὡς φάραγες ἐφαίνοντο ὑπὸ τῶν ὁρώντων αὐτήν· αἱ δὲ τῆς εὐειδοῦς αὐτῆς ὀψεως ἁρμονία ἀπὸ τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης κακουχίας διαυγεῖς γεγόνασιν, ὁμοίως καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν αὐτῆς σῶμα. Πᾶσα δὲ ἡ Ἱεροσόλυμα ὡς περὶ ἀνδρὸς εὐνούχου εἶχον ὑπόληψιν ἀγαθὴν περὶ αὐτῆς· καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων ὑπελάμβανεν αὐτὴν εἶναι γυναῖκα, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἐγὼ τι τοιοῦτον ἐνόησα· εὐλογήθη δὲ παρ' αὐτῆς ὡς παρ' ἀνδρὸς εὐνούχου. (*VPel* ch.45.311–318)

Through her life in penitence, Pelagia manages to efface the appearance of her sinful body so effectively that she becomes unrecognisable. The incident of James' meeting with her shows once more that appearance is strongly related to one's identity.¹⁵ The first time James saw Pelagia, he thought that she was a prostitute because of the way she was dressed and behaved, and that she was therefore an immoral person. Now that Pelagia's disfigured body shows nothing of the prostitute he once saw, James does not recognise her. The image that he has in his mind about Pelagia the prostitute does not correspond to the image of the person now standing before him; therefore, "Pelagios" is not the Pelagia he knows.

When Zosimas meets Mary the Egyptian for the first time, he thinks that she is a man because the look of her body does not correspond to the image he has of the female body. The creature he sees is:

¹⁵ This idea becomes more evident in the Lives of holy women who cross-dress in order to enter a male monastic community (see below, Chapter 3). In general, appearance plays a vital role in the construction of a saintly identity.

Naked [...] with a black body, as if tanned by the scorching of the sun. It has on its head hair white as wool, and even this is sparse as it does not reach below the neck of its body. (tr. Kouli 1996: 76)

γυμνὸν [...] μέλαν τῷ σώματι, ὡς ἐξ ἡλιακῆς φλογὸς μέλαν γενόμενον, καὶ τρίχας ἔχοντα ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ [λευκὰς] ὥσει ἔριον, ὀλίγας δὲ καὶ αὐτάς, ὡς μὴ πλεόν τοῦ τραχήλου τοῦ σώματος καταφέρεσθαι. (*VMarAeg* ch.10)

Possibly, Mary and Pelagia are thought to be men not only because of their appearance but also because the men who encounter them do not expect them to be women. James is advised by the bishop Nonnos to visit a eunuch monk called Pelagios (*VPel* ch.43.300–303). As for Zosimas, he is looking for a saintly desert father who would edify him (*VMarAeg* ch.10). Zosimas' mind cannot go so far as to think that the wild desert, which is entered by pious monks for the achievement of higher levels of spirituality, could be inhabited by a woman.

The heroines' holy bodies are not subject to the laws of nature. While the sinful body is distinguished by the pleasure it enjoys and the penitent body by the pain it feels, the holy body has no natural senses. The feelings caused by hunger, cold, heat and pain are unknown to the holy body. Being a spiritual body, it is "fed and covered by the word of God" (*VMarAeg* ch.30). The holy body is also marked by its miraculous powers. Mary, for instance, walks on water, levitates, travels at super-natural speed and possesses the power of prophetic clairvoyance.

Whereas the features of the holy body presented so far are in conflict with the main characteristics of the sinful body, the holy body appears to have some remarkable similarities with the sinful body. Thus these two bodies or selves form an intricate relationship: on one hand they are opposed to each other, and on the other they are parallel to each other. As for the parallels between the two bodies, both bodies, in contrast to the repentant body, are famous, visible to men and desired by them.

As we have seen, the sinful bodies of Eudokia and Taïsia are famous for their beauty. They are depicted as if being on a stage so that they can be seen by the men who desire them. Pelagia, on the other hand, being a famous actress and dancer, literally performs on a stage. The heroines' disappearance from their societies erases the fame they have. Their holiness, however, provides them with a new form of reputation. The saintly deeds of Pelagia/Pelagios, for example, are renowned in many monasteries and the whole of Jerusalem is aware of this person's

holy conduct (*VPel* ch.45.315–316, ch.47.329–330). After James spreads it around that Pelagia/Pelagios is dead, a huge crowd of monks gathers outside her cell (*VPel* ch.49.339–341). This scene, in which many men leave their monasteries and come from afar in order to see the holy relic of Pelagia/Pelagios and attend her burial, recalls the scenes from the Lives of the sinful Eudokia and Taïsia discussed above, where men leave their houses and travel long distances in order to see them.

They took out [from the cell] the holy relic of the saint [being] much more precious than gold and precious stones; and after all of them had kissed it with all respect and veneration they laid it on a bier.

ἐξήνεγκαν τὸ ἅγιον καὶ ὑπὲρ χρυσίου καὶ λίθων τίμιον πολὺ τιμιώτερον λείψανον τοῦ ἁγίου· καὶ μετὰ πάσης τιμῆς καὶ φόβου ἅπαντες ἀσπασάμενοι αὐτὸ ἔθηκαν ἐπὶ σκαμνίων. (*VPel* ch.49.341–344)

The dead body of Pelagia placed on a bier, which functions as a form of stage encircled by many people, becomes a spectacle. The description of her holy body as something more precious than the most precious jewellery constitutes an allusion to the image of her sinful body which was covered by expensive jewellery. Her fellow citizens used to call her Pearl (Μαργαριτώ) after the quantities of jewellery that adorned her body (*VPel* ch.30.215–216). Now her dead body, due to its holiness, is again treated as a precious object.

The holy body is also desirable. Zosimas, for instance, desires greatly Mary's presence. The first time he sees her in the desert he runs after her forgetting his old age and tiredness while she is running away in order to avoid meeting him. Being afraid that Mary might manage to escape, Zosimas begins to cry and plead with her to stay and offer him her blessing. By the time Mary leaves Zosimas, after she has told him her life-story and arranged with him to meet a year later, Zosimas is already waiting for the moment when he will see her again:

But deep inside him he entreated God to show him again the person he longed for. He was worried and anxious as he considered the length of one year, wishing if possible that one year would become one day. (tr. Kouli 1996: 88)

καθ' ἑαυτὸν δὲ τὸν Θεὸν καθικέτευσεν, δεῖξαι αὐτῷ αὖθις τὸ ποθοῦμενον πρόσωπον. Ἐδυσχέραινε δὲ καὶ ἐδυσφόρει τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ ἐννοῶν τὴν περίοδον, μίαν ἐνθέλων τὸν ἐνιαυτὸν ἡμέραν γενέσθαι, ὥς οἷόν τε ἦν. (*VMarAeg* ch.33)

When at last the year passes, Zosimas goes to the bank of the Jordan and

waits impatiently for Mary. Since she is late, Zosimas begins to worry that she might not appear. Her appearance is important to him not only because he desires to see such a holy person again but also because he sees her presence before him as a manifestation of his own holiness. The incident of Mary's transformation, analysed earlier in this chapter, has taught Zosimas that God reveals his mysteries not to everybody but to those who deserve such divine revelations. Thus he thinks he may not be worthy to be granted Mary's presence ever again:

While he sat [there], the monk said to himself, "Is it possible that my own unworthiness prevented her from coming? [...]" While he was saying these words he wept, and while he shed tears he sighed. He raised his eyes to heaven and prayed to God saying, "Do not deprive me, Lord, of laying eyes again on what Thou didst once allow me to see. Do not let me depart empty-handed, carrying my own sins for judgment. [...] Alas for my unworthiness and pitiable condition! Who deprived me rightly of such good?" (tr. Kouli 1996: 89)

Ἐλεγεν δὲ καθ' ἑαυτὸν ὁ γέρων καθήμενος· Ἄρα γε μὴ ποτε τὸ ἀνάξιόν μου ἐλθεῖν ταύτην διεκώλυσεν; [...] Ταῦτα λέγων ἐδάκρυσεν, καὶ δακρύσας ἐστέναξεν, καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐπάρας, τὸν Θεὸν ἱκέτευσεν λέγων· Μὴ στερήσης με, Δέσποτα, καὶ αὖθις ἰδεῖν ὅπερ ἰδεῖν συνεχώρησας· μὴ ἀπέλθω κενός, τὰς ἐμὰς ἀμαρτίας φέρων εἰς ἔλεγχον. [...] Οἶμοι τῆς ἐμῆς ἀναξιότητος! οἶμοι τῆς ἐμῆς ἐλεεινότητος! Τίς με τοιοῦτου καλοῦ δικαίως ἐστέρησεν; (*VMarAeg* ch.34)

It seems that Zosimas' desire to meet Mary is as strong as Mary's desires, first for sexual intercourse, then for seeing the Holy Cross and later for being forgiven. The desire for seeing and experiencing different things is the driving force which brings together the central heroines and the men of the texts analysed in this chapter. Their desires, changing according to the situations in which they find themselves, also sustain the structures of the texts. The narratives develop through the heroines' and the men's attempts to satisfy their desires. The transformation of the heroines' initial desire to look after their bodies into their desire to take care of their souls, as well as the men's desire to influence this transformation or to be informed about it, are also related to the desire that the late antique and medieval audiences had for the listening to or the reading of the holy penitents' Lives, as the high popularity of these Lives attests.

CHAPTER 3

The Making, Remaking and Unmaking of the Gendered Body: The Case of the Holy Cross-Dresser

Introduction

Most Byzantine hagiographers appear to see the holy women they venerate as individuals who surpass their femaleness, which by definition is weak and lacks spirituality (Ashbrook-Harvey 1990: 40; Cameron 1989: 192; Cloke 1995: 33–56, 214–216; Coon 1997). For instance, Gregory of Nyssa, the hagiographer of Macrina, wonders in the prologue of Macrina's Life how he could possibly call her a woman, since she is above femaleness (*VMacr* ch.1.14–17). The transcendence of femininity is considered by both the Church Fathers and the hagiographers as the only road leading women to salvation (Aspegren 1990; Castelli 1991). As the anonymous hagiographer of Elisabeth the Wonderworker puts it, holy women:

Transform feminine frailty to manly resolution and through self-discipline and painful ascetic practice, courageously overthrow the ancient conqueror of our foremother Eve and common enemy of the human race through the power of the Most High, and are crowned with the shining trophies of victory. (tr. Karras 1996: 122)

τὸ ἀσθενὲς τοῦ θήλεως εἰς γνῶμην μεταβαλοῦσας ἀνδρείαν καὶ δι' ἐγκρατείας καὶ ἀσκήσεως ἐπιπόνου τὸν τῆς προμήτορος Εὔας ἀρχαῖον περνιστὴν καὶ κοινὸν τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου γένους ἐχθρὸν καὶ πολέμιον καταβαλοῦσας γενναίως τῇ τοῦ ὑψίστου δυνάμει καὶ λαμπρὰ τὰ τῆς νίκης ἀναδησαμένας τρόπαια. (*VElisThaum* ch.1)

The female cross-dresser performs a role of female sanctity in the realisation of which the notion of holy women's manliness finds simultaneously a literal and a metaphorical application. The holy cross-dresser is admired by both her hagiographer and some persons in the narrative because through her asceticism she manages not only to acquire

spirituality, that is, manliness in the Christian sense (Castelli 1991), but also actually to incorporate manliness in its social sense. For example, Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, the hagiographer of Euphrosyne the Younger, comments with admiration about his heroine that "She not only fought in a manly way, but also, [...] having changed [her female] appearance, fought alongside men [...] constraining [her female] nature to a high degree" (Οὐ γὰρ μόνον ἀνδρικῶς ἡγωνίσσατο, ἀλλὰ καὶ [...] τὸ σχῆμα μεταβαλοῦσα μετ' ἀνδρῶν ἡγωνίζετο [...] τὴν φύσιν μάλα βιαζομένη. *VEuphrIun* ch.49).

At another point of the narrative Xanthopoulos remarks:

She had such a manliness and nobility that not only did she prevail over the passions of nature in this way, but also established herself as strong and invincible in battle by living among men. [...] Indeed, she demonstrated her manly and noble nature not by choosing to flee the sight of men, but rather by living with them and truly not being defeated; she sought to remain unnoticed and thus restrained the disturbances of nature, and thereupon she demonstrated the cowardice of the entire female sex which flees completely from the dealings with men, should they want to protect themselves.

Ὅσον δ' ἦν ἀνδρείας αὐτῇ καὶ γενναιότητος τὸ μὴ μόνον οὕτω τῶν παθῶν περιγενέσθαι τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ μάχην οὕτως ἐνστήσασθαι καρτερὰν καὶ ἀκαταγώνιστον, ἐπὶ μέσων ἀρρένων συνδιατρίβουσαν [...] ὄντως γὰρ ὄντως ἤλεγξε τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἀνδρικὸν καὶ γενναῖον τὸ μὴ αἰρεῖσθαι φυγεῖν ἀρρένων ὅφεις ἀλλὰ καὶ μᾶλλον σὺν αὐτοῖς διάγειν καὶ μὴ τοι γε ἡττηθῆναι ἀλλὰ καὶ λαθεῖν σπουδάσαι καὶ οὕτω χαλινῶσαι τὸ τῆς φύσεως σκίρτημα κἀντεῦθεν καὶ δειλὸν ἀπελέγξει σύμπαν τὸ θῆλυ, φεῦγον ὡς ἐπίπαν, εἴ γε βούλοιτο φυλαχθῆναι, τὴν ἐπιμιξίαν τοῦ ἄρρενος. (*VEuphrIun* ch.9)

Here Xanthopoulos suggests that a holy woman such as Euphrosyne the Younger deserves to be doubly praised. In contrast to other women, such as the nun and the solitary, who escape men entirely, thus avoiding possible temptation of the flesh, the holy cross-dresser pursues a religious life among men without falling into temptation. The cross-dresser's deeds are more praiseworthy because they are characterised by a twofold manliness which is more difficult to achieve. By presenting herself as a monk, the cross-dresser undertakes the task of serving God on the same terms as men do and therefore she suppresses her "weak" nature internally as well as externally.

The subject of the present chapter is the religious role of the cross-

dresser. Evelyn Patlagean in her seminal article "L'histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance" gives a list of the hagiographical texts devoted to cross-dressers (Patlagean 1976: 600–602). Patlagean's list contains twelve texts from which the Lives of Susanna and Euphrosyne the Younger are missing.¹

Apart from the cross-dressers' Lives listed by Patlagean and those of Susanna and Euphrosyne the Younger, there are another two texts in the corpus of Byzantine Greek female Lives in which the heroines cross-dress. These heroines are Thecla and Eusebia/Xene. Both Thecla and Eusebia/Xene differ substantially from the holy cross-dressers and this is probably the reason why Patlagean does not include their Lives in her list. In contrast to the holy cross-dressers, Thecla and Eusebia/Xene cross-dress only temporarily and consequently the role of the cross-dresser is not a narrative element which leads to the development of their Lives' plots.

Thecla cross-dresses so that she can travel alone freely and thus avoid male desire which endangers her virginity (*VThec* ch.25.17–21). Despite her male disguise, Thecla never passes as a man in the narrative. Unlike the heroines whom I call holy cross-dressers, Thecla does not adopt a male name and a male identity; her female gender is never effaced.

The second heroine, Eusebia/Xene, cross-dresses with the aim of escaping her parents' notice, while they are organising her wedding (*VEusebX* ch.5). Her male disguise also enables her to flee easily from her home-town. As soon as Eusebia arrives at a place where nobody knows her, she changes her male clothes for female ones (*VEusebX* ch.7.3–5) and in so doing she becomes a woman again. In order to remain unknown and not to be discovered by her parents, Eusebia adopts a new name. This name, Xene (*VEusebX* ch.7.14), which means "stranger", is in accordance with her new identity as a stranger in a city unknown to her.

The texts which will be discussed here are: the Life of Pelagia (*VPel BHG* 1478), the Life of Susanna (*VSus BHG* 1673), the Life of Theodora of Alexandria (*VTheodAl BHG* 1727), the Life of Euphrosyne (*VEuphr BHG* 625), the Life of Mary (*VMar Vita antiqua* ed. Marcel

Richard), the Life of Matrona (*VMatr BHG* 1221), the Life of Marina (*VMarina BHG* 1170), and the Life of Euphrosyne the Younger (*VEuphr-lun BHG* 627). The reasons why six texts from Patlagean's list are not examined here are related to questions of language and genre. More specifically: the pre-metaphrastic Life of Eugenia has come down to us in Syriac,² while the Lives of Hilaria and Apollinaria are written in Coptic. As far as genre issues are concerned, the story of Anastasia Patrikia and that of Athanasia are classified as *Apophthegmata Patrum*. The story of Anna appears in a rather summary form in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*.³ Here we will look first at the contents of the eight texts under consideration before offering an explanation for the appearance of female cross-dressers in Byzantine hagiography.

The date of the anonymous Life of Susanna is uncertain.⁴ However, it must have been composed in Late Antiquity, most probably in the fourth century (Delierneux 1997: 213). According to her legend, Susanna is the child of a pagan man and a Jewish woman from Palestine. After her parents' death, Susanna converts to Christianity. Later she distributes her large property to the poor and enters the male monastery of Philip disguised as a man called John. Susanna/John leads an exemplary ascetic life in the monastery of Philip. At some point in her twentieth year in the same monastic community, one of its female visitors falls in love with her and tries unsuccessfully to seduce her. This woman finally accuses Susanna/John of raping her. Susanna/John is then asked by the abbot to abandon her monastic habit and leave the monastery. In order to prove her innocence, Susanna/John reveals her female sex. Being by nature a woman, Susanna is forced to leave the monastery immediately. She is sent to a nunnery where she becomes the abbess. While leading the life of an abbess, she is arrested by the pagan authorities of her times for being a leading Christian. She undergoes martyrdom and dies in prison.

The anonymous Life of Theodora is dated to the mid-fifth (Usener 1879: xix) or the sixth century at the latest (Wessely 1889: 24). Theodo-

¹ The texts enumerated by Patlagean are devoted to the following saints: Anastasia Patrikia, Anna/Ephesianos, Apollinaria/Dorotheos, Athanasia, Eugenia/Eugenios, Euphrosyne/Smaragdus, Hilaria/Hilarion, Marina, Mary/Marinos, Matrona/Babylas, Pelagia/Pelagios, Theodora/Theodore.

² A Greek metaphrastic version of Eugenia's legend is included in Symeon Metaphrastes' collection, PG 116: 610–652.

³ For this text see Delierneux 2002.

⁴ Information about the Life of Pelagia and a short summary of its content are provided in the previous chapter (pp. 60–61).

ra is a beautiful, married woman from Alexandria, who betrays her husband. Immediately after committing the sin of adultery, Theodora feels guilty and decides to repent. She cross-dresses, names herself Theodore and enters a male monastery where she becomes an exemplary monk who works miracles. Once she is asked by the abbot to go to the town to buy wheat. On her way back she spends the night in another monastery, the abbot of which has a daughter who later accuses Theodora/Theodore of having fathered her child. Theodora/Theodore does not deny the accusation and is punished by being ostracised from the monastery. She is also given the child of the abbot's daughter to raise. Seven years later she is re-admitted to the monastery with the child. On the day of Theodora's/Theodore's death, the abbot has a vision in which a voice tells him that his monk Theodore is a woman, Theodora, who cross-dressed and entered his monastery in an attempt to repent for her sin. The voice goes on to say that through her pious life Theodora has reached the status of holiness. Very soon after the abbot's vision Theodora is found dead in her cell.

Euphrosyne's Life, like the majority of the texts examined here, is anonymous. It is believed to have been written between the sixth and seventh centuries (Patlagean 1976: 601). The text's story reads as follows: the conception and birth of the central heroine, Euphrosyne, are attributed to the prayers of an abbot made on behalf of her father Paphnutios. When Euphrosyne reaches her twelfth year, her mother dies and her father undertakes her education. As soon as Euphrosyne reaches the age of marriage Paphnutios betroths her to the son of a rich and noble man. Some time after her betrothal, Paphnutios takes Euphrosyne to the monastery of the abbot who prayed for her birth so that she can have his blessing before her marriage. Euphrosyne is attracted by monastic life and eventually decides to enter holy orders. She cross-dresses and goes to the monastery of the pious abbot. The abbot accepts Euphrosyne, who now passes as a eunuch called Smaragdus. However, the sight of this good-looking eunuch arouses the other monks who are troubled by sinful thoughts. In order to protect his monks from temptation, the abbot isolates Euphrosyne/Smaragdus in a cell. Her only company is her tutor Agapios. Meanwhile Paphnutios, out of his mind with grief at the disappearance of his daughter, goes to the abbot seeking consolation. The abbot, in turn, sends Paphnutios to Euphrosyne/Smaragdus for comfort. Paphnutios visits his daughter regularly for many years without sus-

pecting who she really is. Eventually, due to her harsh ascetic life Euphrosyne/Smaragdus falls ill and just before her death she discloses her identity to her father.

Mary's Life is another anonymous text. Marcel Richard argues that the story of Mary—who in the Western tradition is known as Marina—was an oral narrative which, at some point between 525 and 650, was committed to writing (Richard 1975: 83, 112). The story of Mary was very popular in the Middle Ages; it was adapted into both medieval Eastern and Western languages, such as Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopian, Armenian, Arabic, French and German (Constas 1996: 1).

According to her story, Mary loses her mother at a very young age and is brought up by her father Eugenios, who after having fulfilled his obligations as a father resolves to retire to a monastery. Mary insists on following him, and Eugenios therefore dresses her as a young man, calls her Marinos and takes her with him to a monastery. At some point Mary's/Marinos' father dies and she keeps on leading the life of a cenobitic monk. After having been sent outside the monastery with three other monks to run some errands and having had to spend the night in an inn, she is accused of impregnating the innkeeper's daughter. Like Theodora/Theodore, Mary/Marinos does not deny the charge and is therefore dismissed from the monastery. When the child of the innkeeper's daughter is born, it is given to Mary/Marinos to bring up. Three years later Mary/Marinos is readmitted to the monastery where she eventually dies. Her sex is discovered when her body is prepared for burial. Then the innkeeper's daughter becomes possessed but is miraculously released after she confesses the truth about the father of her child.

In his edition of the various versions of Matrona's Life, Delehay suggests that the Life of Matrona was written around the middle of the sixth century by a monk of the monastery of Bassianos, using the notes of Eulogia, a nun from Matrona's nunnery (Delehay 1910: 789–790). Eva Catafygiotou-Topping does not share the opinion of a male authorship of the text (Catafygiotou-Topping 1988). Cyril Mango argues against Catafygiotou-Topping's suggestion that Matrona's Life was written by a woman. The author's self-referential participles appearing in the Life, which are masculine, indicate a male authorship (Featherstone and Mango 1996: 14).

The story of Matrona reads as follows: she is born in Perge and when she grows up she is married off to a man called Dometianos with

whom she has a daughter called Theodote. At some point the family moves to Constantinople. Matrona has problems with her husband who abuses her and does not let her lead her religious life. She then abandons her family, cross-dresses, calls herself Babylas and enters a male monastery where she leads the life of a monk. When her female identity is discovered, Matrona has to leave the monastery. She goes to a convent in Emesa in Syria. As soon as her husband, who is following her, finds out where she is, she has to leave the convent. She goes to Jerusalem and then to Sinai. Eventually she finds refuge in a pagan temple near Beirut. After a period of solitary ascetic life, Matrona creates a community of nuns in the area but does not want to stay there. She longs to go back to Constantinople to be near her former abbot and spiritual father Bassianos. Being afraid of her husband she hesitates to return. An allegorical dream, which informs her that her return to Constantinople is God's will, makes her leave all her hesitations behind. She goes back to Constantinople, where she founds a female monastic community and ends her life as an exemplary abbess.

Marina's Life was written by an anonymous hagiographer in the eleventh or twelfth century (Taibbi 1959). According to her Life, Marina is a Sicilian who from an early age receives a Christian education from her mother and becomes a pious girl strongly attached to God. When her parents are thinking of marrying her off, she convinces them that she is not eligible for marriage by pretending to be mad. Four years later she resolves to enter holy orders. After she has been given the monastic habit by a monk, she enters a small cell where she leads the life of a solitary. While in her cell, Marina becomes famous as a wonderworker; many diseased people visit her and are healed by her. Wishing to avoid worldly fame, Marina cross-dresses, changes her name to Marinos and goes on board a ship destined for Jerusalem. On the ship, some sailors attempt to kill her in order to steal the money they think she has. One of the sailors, in his attempt to touch Marina/Marinos, becomes miraculously possessed, a fact which prevents the other sailors from harming her. She eventually heals the possessed sailor. As soon as she arrives in Jerusalem, Marina/Marinos enters a monastery where she stays for three years. Longing to see her home-town again, she leaves the monastery and returns to Sicily where she finds her parents dead. Some time later she returns to her monastery and stays for another five years. Realising that her death is approaching, she returns to Sicily in order to die there.

The Life of Euphrosyne the Younger was written in the fourteenth century by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, a famous Byzantine hagiographer and ecclesiastical writer of the late Byzantine period.⁵ Marie-France Auzépy suggests that Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos wrote Euphrosyne's Life after having been commissioned by the monastery of Theotokos of the Source (τῆς Πηγῆς) where, according to the Life, Euphrosyne goes as soon as she ends her life as a solitary monk. The composition of Euphrosyne's Life was an attempt to establish the historical continuity of the monastery of the Lady Euphrosyne (Auzépy 1993: 124–125).

The Life of Euphrosyne the Younger reads as follows: A childless couple from the Peloponnese manages after many years of prayer to give birth to a girl who is given the name Euphrosyne. Euphrosyne grows up a beautiful and very pious girl. At some point her parents send her to stay with her uncle's family in Constantinople until a suitable nunnery is found for her. On the wedding night of her cousin, Euphrosyne secretly leaves her uncle's house, and finds shelter in the deserted house of a miller. She spends three months there, during which she undertakes the role of the solitary. Being discovered by the miller and his wife, she abandons the house. Eventually she cross-dresses, calls herself John and enters a monastery. She proves to be such an exemplary monk that she is elected as the monastery's abbot. Not willing to accept this honour, Euphrosyne/John secretly abandons the monastery and becomes the disciple of an old hermit. During her stay with the hermit, she is frequently attacked by Satan who refers loudly to her female nature. Being afraid that her femaleness might become known to the hermit, she abandons him in secret. She finally dresses as a woman and enters a convent in Constantinople. The fame of her pious conduct is soon spread around and she is visited by many laypeople. Longing for isolation and *hesychia*, she makes an underground cell to which she retreats. In her career as a solitary, Euphrosyne changes cells in order to avoid her visitors and be completely alone. She dies as a solitary in old age after becoming ill through her austere asceticism.

Both the Life of Marina and that of Euphrosyne the Younger were composed in a period when the role of the holy cross-dresser had lost its popularity. This role of female sanctity, which was a creation of the

⁵ On Xanthopoulos, see Beck 1959: 705–707 and Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1902.

early Eastern monastic culture, was very popular in Late Antiquity (Patlagean 1976). A stark difference between the Lives of the earlier period and those of the later period is that the earlier Lives have a prominent erotic element which is completely absent from the later texts. The presence of both Marina and Euphrosyne the Younger in a male monastery is not related to any erotic scandal, as is the case of Theodora of Alexandria, Susanna, Mary and Euphrosyne. Another interesting difference between the earlier and the later texts is the way in which the saint abandons her monastery. In the earlier texts, such as the Lives of Susanna and Matrona, the saints' female identity is revealed while they are in the monasteries. Then both Susanna and Matrona are forced to give up their male roles and leave their monasteries. Thus as women they come out of the monasteries that they entered as men. Marina and Euphrosyne the Younger, on the other hand, leave their monasteries when they themselves resolve to do so, and they come out of them in the same way they entered them, namely as men. Unlike Susanna and Matrona, the female identity of both Marina and Euphrosyne the Younger is not disclosed during their lives in male monasteries.

Many scholars have attempted to interpret and explain the appearance of the cross-dressed heroine in religious literature.⁶ Delehayé suggests that the motif of the cross-dresser was invented to make more interesting the story of a prostitute from Antioch called Pelagia mentioned in *Homily 67* of John Chrysostom. According to Delehayé, the Lives of holy cross-dressers originate in Pelagia's story (Delehayé 1955: 186–195). Hermann Usener argues that the phenomenon of the holy cross-dresser constitutes a survival of the ancient religious ceremonies dedicated to Aphrodite, during which women used to sacrifice to the goddess in men's clothes and men in women's clothes (Usener 1879: 20–23). Also Natalie Delierneux sees the origin of the motif of the female cross-dresser in the classical tradition: in the legends of Iphis and Leukippe (Delierneux 1997).⁷

⁶ For a brief history of scholarship on cross-dressed saints, see Constan 1996: 3–4 and Davis 2002: 5–11.

⁷ Iphis was the daughter of a man called Ligdus and a woman named Telethousa. Ligdus asked Telethousa to abandon their child if it was a girl. When Telethousa gave birth to a girl she disguised her as a boy and called her Iphis, a name common to both sexes. When Iphis grew up, a girl fell in love with her. The two girls were engaged. Telethousa postponed the marriage until she could not defer it any longer. She then asked the goddess Isis to help

The theories of Usener and Delehayé have been criticised by Marie Delcourt, who explains the phenomenon of the female cross-dresser through a psychological approach and argues that women who became monks must have existed in reality. Delcourt suggests that cross-dressing constitutes a form of self-mutilation leading to androgynous perfection (Delcourt 1958). John Anson's approach is also psychoanalytical, not from the protagonist heroines' point of view though, but from the perspective of the male writers of the Lives. According to Anson, the female cross-dresser is the creation of monks who have a "secret longing for a woman in a monastery" (Anson 1974: 30). This woman, argues Anson, serves as a scapegoat that embodies and purifies these monks' sexual temptations. In his socio-historical study, Vern Bullough sees the female cross-dressers not as a male creation but as a female reality and necessity in a male-dominated society. Bullough argues that the act of female cross-dressing is an attempt from the women's side to imitate the superior sex and acquire status in their patriarchal societies (Bullough 1974). Stephen Davis suggests that the characterisation of holy cross-dressers as depicted in Late Antique and Byzantine Lives is composed of elements from previous texts, images and discourses (Davis 2002). All these approaches are interesting and each of them has something to add to our understanding of the phenomenon of the holy cross-dresser. However, following Patlagean, I would explain the appearance of the female cross-dresser in hagiography in a theological context.

Patlagean interprets the phenomenon of the holy cross-dresser through the Gospel according to Thomas. She suggests that the keys for the understanding of the holy cross-dressers' legends are two complementary passages from the Gospel according to Thomas which present androgyny as the highest quality (Patlagean 1976: 607–608). The first is Saying 22, where Jesus says to his disciples that they will enter the Kingdom of Heaven if they manage to make male and female one and the same, so that the male and the female cease to exist as categories:

her. Isis turned Iphis into a boy and the marriage took place (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IX.666–797). Leukippe's sister Theonoe was abducted by pirates and sold to Icarus, the king of Caria. Leukippe set off to look for her sister and father who was lost in his attempt to find Theonoe. Leukippe shaved her hair and disguised herself as a priest. When she arrived at Caria, her sister, without recognising her, fell in love with her. Leukippe rejected Theonoe's advances and Theonoe asked one of her slaves, who happened to be her father, to kill Leukippe. Eventually Leukippe recognised her father and revealed her identity (Hyginus, *Fabulae* CXC).

Jesus said to them: "When you make the two into one and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like below—that is, to make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female will not be female [...]—then you will enter [the Kingdom]." (*Gospel of Thomas*, Saying 22; tr. Bethge et al. 1998: 13)

The second passage from the Gospel according to Thomas is Christ's response to Simon Peter's comment that as a woman Mary Magdalene does not deserve the life in Christ:

Simon Peter said to them: "Let Mary go away from us, for women are not worthy of life." Jesus said: "Look, I will draw her in so as to make her male, so that she too may become a living male spirit, similar to you. [...] Every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven." (*Gospel of Thomas*, Saying 114; tr. Bethge et al. 1998: 32)

These two passages (Sayings 22 and 114), which Patlagean understands as complementary, are strikingly contradictory. As Elisabeth Castelli (Castelli 1991: 32) rightly argues, in Saying 22 Christ refers not to a status of androgyny but to an erasure of the categories of male and female, whereas in Saying 114 he presents not androgyny but manliness as the highest quality (cf. Brown 1988: 103–121, esp. 113).

However, I also think that Saying 114, along with patristic writings referring to the manliness of the holy woman, is among the theological texts which offer a key to the understanding of the holy cross-dresser's role.⁸ In fact, as mentioned above, the notion of the holy woman's manliness is present in almost all female Lives. In the case of the holy cross-dresser's role, however, it becomes the central theme through the act of cross-dressing and the heroines' entry into male monasteries. Hagiography, as has been mentioned in the introduction and in Chapter 1 of this book, draws its ideology and models of sanctity mainly from the Bible and from patristic doctrines. Like other roles of female sanctity which originate in the Bible and are related to Christ's life, such as the martyr, the penitent, the virgin and the mother of a saint, the cross-dresser has its origins in the patristic doctrine of the holy woman's manliness and in Christ's words as they appear both in the Gospel according to Thomas and in the following biblical passages:⁹

⁸ For the impact of the Gospel according to Thomas on early Christian thought and literature, see Patterson 1998: 65–71.

⁹ The origin of an unorthodox male role of sanctity, namely that of the holy fool, is also to be found in a biblical passage, 1 Cor. 3.18–19 (Saward 1980: 2–7).

Then he [Jesus] called the people to him, as well as his disciples, and said to them, "Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine *must leave himself behind*; he must take up his cross and come with me. Whoever cares for his own safety is lost; but *if a man will let himself be lost for my sake* and for the Gospel, *that man is safe*." (Mk. 8.34–35; emphasis added)

But if a man will *let himself be lost* for my sake, he will *find his true self*. (Mt. 16.25; emphasis added)

Once when great crowds were accompanying him [Jesus], he turned to them and said: "If anyone comes to me and does not *hate* his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even *his own life*, he cannot be a disciple of mine." (Lk. 14.25–26; emphasis added)

These words of Christ reach the heroines of the Lives discussed in this chapter either as a written text, an extract they come across after opening the Bible, or as an oral text dictated and explained to them by a spiritual father. It does not seem to be a coincidence that some of these heroines cross-dress and enter a monastery immediately after they encounter Christ's words referring to self-denial. There seems to be a link between Christ's summons to his followers and the heroines' decision to deny their femaleness through cross-dressing.

Matrona, for instance, is wondering how she could become a nun by escaping the notice of her husband. She then has a dream during which she finds herself fleeing her husband and being rescued by some monks. Matrona then thinks that the dream might be a divine sign providing her with the answer she is looking for. In order to liberate herself from her husband and thus have her soul saved, she should enter a monastery as a man. Even though she cross-dresses, she hesitates to make her way to a monastery and instead goes to the church of the Holy Apostles, where after a long prayer she opens the Scripture. The passage she comes across is the following: "*The Lord said to His disciples, 'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me'*" (Mk. 8.34; tr. Featherstone, in Featherstone and Mango 1996: 22; Εἶπεν ὁ Κύριος τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς "Ὅστις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔλθειν, ἀπαρνησάθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι. *VMatr* ch.4). After reading this passage, Matrona, full of joy and without any further delay, goes to the monastery of Bassianos. It is obvious that Matrona interprets Christ's words referring to self-denial as renunciation of her female self and of her life in secular society as a woman, during which she has to perform the roles of wife and mother.

According to Christ, the denial of the self is the decisive act which leads to personal salvation: the individual who “lets himself be lost” for God’s sake “is safe”. The issue of salvation in association with the denial of the female self through cross-dressing plays an important role in the cross-dressers’ Lives. Susanna, for instance, says to the abbot of the monastery she enters that she wishes to become a monk in order to have her soul saved (ἦκω νῦν ἐνταῦθα τοῦ Θεοῦ με ὠδηγήσαντος, ἵνα ποιήσης με ὡς ἓνα τῶν ἀδελφῶν τῶν ὄντων μετὰ σοῦ, καὶ σωθῇ μου ἡ ψυχὴ. *VSus* ch.4). And later, when she reveals her female sex, the reason for her disguise becomes more explicit: “for the sake of saving her soul, she adopted this angel-like attire and changed her name to John” (ἔνεκεν τοῦ σωσθῆναι αὐτῆς τὴν ψυχὴν μετῆλθεν τὸ ἀγγελικὸν τοῦτο σχῆμα, καὶ μετωνόμασεν ἐαυτὴν Ἰωάννην. *VSus* ch.9).

The issue of salvation and its relation to cross-dressing are also stressed in Mary’s Life, which starts with a discussion on salvation taking place between the central heroine and her father, resulting in Mary’s disguise and entry into a monastery.

Her father said to her, “My child, [...] I am departing in order to save my soul.” Hearing these things [said] by the father, the young girl said to him, “Father, do you wish to save your own soul and see mine destroyed? [...] I shall first cut off the hair of my head, and clothe myself as a man, and then enter the monastery with you.” (tr. Constan 1996: 7)

εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτῆς: “Τέκνον μου, [...] ἐγὼ γὰρ ἀπέρχομαι τὴν ψυχὴν μου σῶσαι”. Ἀκούσασα δὲ ταῦτα ἡ νεάνις παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῆς, λέγει αὐτῷ: “Πάτερ, σὺ τὴν ψυχὴν σου θέλεις σῶσαι καὶ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀπολέσαι; [...] ἀποθρίξασα τὴν κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς μου καὶ ἀνδρεῖον σχῆμα ἐνδυσάμενη συνεισέλθω μετὰ σοῦ εἰς τὸ μοναστήριον”. (*VMar* ch.2.8–13, ch.3.23–25)

In Euphrosyne’s Life, the heroine’s salvation is a repeated theme. When Euphrosyne is brought by her father before the abbot to receive his blessing, she kneels in front of him and asks him to pray to God for her personal salvation (Εὐχου ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, δέομαί σου, ἵνα ὁ Θεὸς σώσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν μου. *VEuphr* ch.4.31). Later, when Euphrosyne decides to devote herself to God but, being afraid of her father, still hesitates to put her decision into practice, she reveals her thoughts to a monk who discourages her from following her father’s will and marrying. He advises her to leave the house secretly and go to a monastery so that she can have her soul saved (*VEuphr* ch.6.24–25). A second monk, who meets Euphrosyne,

says to her: “Since the Lord says: ‘the one who does not deny father and mother and brothers and children, even his own soul, cannot be my disciple’, what more can I tell you?” (Τοῦ Κυρίου λέγοντος “Ὅστις οὐκ ἀποτάσσεται πατέρα καὶ μητέρα καὶ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τέκνα, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν, οὐ δύναται μου εἶναι μαθητής, ἐγὼ τί σοι ἔχω εἰπεῖν πλεῖον τούτων; *VEuphr* ch.8.18–21). The monk goes on to tell her what the first monk suggests, namely that she should not let her soul get lost by marrying (μόνον σὺ τὴν ψυχὴν σου μὴ ἀπολέσῃς. *VEuphr* ch.8.25–26). Then Euphrosyne answers that she could fight for her own salvation (ἀγωνίσασθαι ἔχω τοῦ σῶσαι τὴν ψυχὴν μου. *VEuphr* ch.8.27). Immediately afterwards, Euphrosyne cross-dresses and enters a monastery. It seems that the repetition of the theme of salvation in the Life of Euphrosyne is somehow related to her entry into a male monastery. The fact that the issue of salvation is repeated in the text underscores Euphrosyne’s agony about her personal salvation and justifies her act of entering a male monastery as a man.

Like other holy men and women of Byzantine Lives, cross-dressers also put into practice Christ’s words that his followers should “take up their cross” in order to be saved. The stories of these women make clear that male disguise and entry into a monastery for God’s sake is a dangerous and difficult task; it is tantamount to the act of “taking up a cross”, otherwise it could not have been considered a way of life leading to salvation and sainthood. The perplexity of a woman’s entry into a male monastery is nowhere better formulated than in Mary’s Life by the heroine’s father Eugenios, who says to her that to enter a monastery while being a woman is like placing one’s self into the “midst of fire”:

Child, take heed how you conduct yourself, for you are about to enter into the midst of fire, for a woman in no way enters a [male] monastery. Preserve yourself therefore blameless before God, so that we may fulfil our vows. (tr. Constan 1996: 7–8)

Βλέπε, τέκνον, πῶς διατηρήσεις ἐαυτήν· μέσον γὰρ πυρὸς μέλλεις εἰσιέναι, διότι οὐδὲ γυνὴ εἰσέρχεται ἐν τῷ μοναστηρίῳ· φύλαξον οὖν ἐαυτήν ἄμειπτον τῷ Θεῷ, ἵνα πληρώσωμεν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν ἡμῶν. (*VMar* ch.4.29–32)

The fact that Mary is later punished, after being accused of fathering a child, proves Eugenios’ words right. If Mary had not pretended to have a male identity she would have spared herself such an accusation and the subsequent punishment.

The heroines we have examined perform the role of the holy cross-dresser after transforming their gendered bodies from female into male. The feminist term “gendered body” denotes the behaviour and appearance which a male and a female body should or should not have in a certain society. In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler has argued that gender is a symbolic form of “public action”. Gender is an identity “instituted in an exterior space through a *stylised repetition of acts*” (Butler 1999: 179). For Butler the body provides a surface upon which various acts and gestures create gendered meanings. This “corporeal signification” shows that gender is not determined by nature. It rather depends on performative acts that give the illusion of naturalness.

In the case of the holy cross-dressers, under examination are the literary societies in which these heroines live and the expectations these societies have from their members. The societies depicted in the texts consist of two types of communities: secular and monastic. The structures of both communities are based on gender difference. The political, economic and family structures of the secular community are based on male dominance and control. In their secular lives, the heroines of the examined texts are controlled by their fathers or husbands. As for monastic communities, they are created according to gender difference. The members of a male monastery have to be men or malelike, whereas the members of a nunnery have to be women. As the Lives of the cross-dressers manifest, gender constitutes by itself a role that has to be undertaken by the members of both the secular and the monastic communities. The fact that the holy cross-dressers pass as men both inside and outside monastic communities indicates that gender is created by particular appearances and performances and that it is not necessarily connected to an individual's sex.

Both the secular and the monastic communities of the examined texts have their own rules and principles regarding the manners and the appearance of their members. A person appears to successfully perform gender and other social or monastic roles when she or he has the required bodily appearance, the one that defines each role. The term “bodily appearance” employed here signifies hair-style, dress code, make-up, jewellery and other ornaments of the body. The way in which these elements appear on the body of a person or the fact that some of them are absent from it, provide it with a particular appearance which is characteristic of a particular role.

Someone who has, for example, both ears pierced is supposed to be a woman, whereas a man is defined by the lack of two ear-piercings; a man might have one pierced ear but not two, as implied in *Matrona's Life*. The female sex of *Matrona/Babylas* is about to be revealed when *Barnabas*, a monk of the monastery where *Matrona/Babylas* leads her religious life, notices that both her ears are pierced and asks her why this happens. *Matrona's/Babylas'* answer is that the woman who brought her up used to put earrings in both her ears, even though she was a boy, so that people thought that she was a girl (*VMatr* ch.5).

According to *Matrona's* hagiographer, the way *Matrona* reacts to *Barnabas'* question is wise enough to turn aside his suspicion that she might be a woman (*VMatr* chs.4–5). Nevertheless, the argument that *Matrona* uses to prevent *Barnabas* from suspecting her female sex, undermines her own attempt to present herself as a man by adopting a male appearance. Through the false story of her treatment as a girl due to her girlish appearance, *Matrona* seems to suggest that appearance might be misleading and not “real”. What *Matrona's* story stresses is that someone who has both ears pierced is not necessarily a woman. But according to the same logic, someone who wears a cassock is not necessarily a monk; and this will be verified later in the narrative when *Matrona's* female sex will be disclosed.

Matrona's pierced ears which have no earrings are indicative of the making and remaking of her bodily appearance in order to fulfil different roles. While a married woman of a certain class living in the secular society, *Matrona* is expected to have both her ears pierced and adorned with earrings. Before entering the monastery of *Bassianos* as a man who wants to become a monk, she has to remove both earrings, since monks are not supposed to wear any jewellery. Both *Barnabas'* question and the reaction of the people in the story of *Matrona/Babylas*, who would consider a child wearing earrings a girl, suggest that an individual's gender can be defined by her or his appearance. This idea is so well established among the persons appearing in the Lives of cross-dressers that it becomes the principle sustaining the structures of the texts. The conviction held by these persons that appearance, name and behaviour make the man and the woman, is what allows the realisation of the holy cross-dresser's role, otherwise it would have been impossible for the heroines to present themselves as men and be accepted as such.

In the following analysis, it will be examined how the role of the

cross-dresser is performed. In fact, it is the gendered body which brings this role into existence. The holy woman can present herself as a man and be accepted as such by changing her external appearance. In contrast to the other roles of sanctity, during the realisation of which the holy women are depicted showing their real selves, the cross-dressed saint pretends to be someone she is not; she lies about her gender identity, as constructed by name, dress code, general appearance and behaviour.

Making: The First Transformation

By a large majority the hagiographers of cross-dressers do not fail to present explicitly the reasons leading their heroines to become monks. The readers or listeners of the texts receive information about these reasons either from the central heroines themselves or from the narrators of their stories. The reasons leading the heroines to cross-dress and enter male monasteries are various and can be divided into two main categories: social and religious.

The first category, that of social motives, emanates from the social realities of the texts. These motives make cross-dressing a social phenomenon which arises due to the inequality reigning in a patriarchal society where men enjoy privileges not shared by women, such as independence and freedom of movement. Most heroines who are led by social motives to cross-dress are presented by the hagiographers as not having any other choice. To be able to devote themselves entirely to God, and thus satisfy their only desire in life, they have to adopt a monk's identity.

The social motives are two: escape from male control and easy and safe travel. Cross-dressing allows Matrona to flee her oppressive husband and Euphrosyne to escape her father who treats her as a commodity, as a possession that he is about to offer to another man through the pact of marriage. Both Matrona and Euphrosyne strongly believe that if they go to a nunnery they will be discovered by their male guardians. Matrona says:

Heaven forbid that Dometianos should cause trouble for the convent which receives me and thus should keep me from the goal of my salvation! (tr. Featherstone, in Featherstone and Mango 1996: 22)

Μήποτε πράγματα παράσχη ὁ Δομετιανὸς τῇ λαμβανούσῃ με μονῇ καὶ κωλύσῃ με τοῦ σκοποῦ τῆς σωτηρίας μου. (*VMatr* ch.4)

Expressing a similar anxiety, Euphrosyne states:

If I go to a nunnery, my father will seek till he finds me and it will happen that he will drag me away to my fiancé. But I will give myself up to a male monastery, where no one will think [of finding me].

Ἐὰν ἀπέλθω εἰς γυναικεῖον μοναστήριον, ὁ πατήρ μου δι' ἐρεῦνης γενόμενος εἰρήσει με καὶ συμβῇ ἀποσπάσαι με διὰ τὸν ὄρμαστόν μου. Ἀλλὰ δίδωμι ἑαυτὴν εἰς κοινόβιον ἀνδρῶν, ὅπου οὐδεὶς ὑπονοεῖ. (*VEuphr* ch.9.35 and 1–3).

The two heroines' notion that male attire would function as a means of concealment which would allow them to escape the men to whom they socially belong is justified by the development of the texts' plots. In the case of Matrona, the monastery of Bassianos appears to be almost the only place assuring her of a calm life away from her husband. As soon as she finds herself outside the monastery she is exposed, and as a result she runs the danger of being caught by her husband who chases her and is determined to take her back. A large part of the remainder of Matrona's Life is centred on her endless travels through which she attempts to escape her husband. Thus, Matrona's peaceful life in the monastery is transformed outside the monastery into a continuous chase. As for Euphrosyne, after her disappearance her father looks for her everywhere, but he never comes to the idea of searching for her in the monastery she has entered (*VEuphr* ch.12.23–27). As a matter of fact, a *male* monastery operates for both Matrona and Euphrosyne as a shelter liberating them from the *male* control their societies impose on them.

Euphrosyne the Younger adopts male attire so that she can move freely and more safely in remote places considered dangerous for women travelling alone. She dresses as a woman again when she decides to leave behind her ascetic life in the wilderness and return to town (Constantinople) where as a woman she is not exposed to danger. After being instructed by God, Marina cross-dresses in order to avoid the dangers she would come across as a beautiful and young woman who travels alone. While disguise serves Euphrosyne the Younger's purpose to travel without danger, in Marina's case, instead of saving her from problems it becomes the source of problems. Her appearance gives the impression to the sailors of the ship on which she travels that she is a man of a

royal family and therefore rich. They thus plan to throw her into the sea so that they can snatch the gold that they think she carries. Of course, in the end the heroine is miraculously saved.

To the second category belong religious motives which are directly linked to personal salvation. The heroines appear to believe that the only way to save their souls is by becoming monks. As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, the desire for salvation is what leads Mary and Susanna to enter a male monastery. This, as underscored earlier, is the hidden reason for all the heroines' entry into monasteries. But it is only in the cases of Mary and Susanna that salvation through the denial of the female self is directly presented as the reason for their decision to become monks.

Theodora the adulteress adopts male attire and enters a male monastic community so that she can repent for her sexual sin (ἀνδράσιν οὖν ἑαυτὴν κατέλεξεν ἵνα λύσῃ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἑαυτῆς. *VTheodAI* p.43). In comparison with the virgin holy cross-dressers, the denial-of-self doctrine through becoming a monk has a different significance in the case of Theodora. The monk's identity, which Theodora adopts, functions as an antidote to her sin as a woman. Her sin is related to her corporeality which is identified with femaleness in patristic writings.¹⁰ Thus Theodora chooses to cross-dress in a desperate attempt to hide her femaleness of which she is ashamed. She denies her sinful female self because she considers it as an obstacle to her salvation. As soon as she commits the sin of adultery, Theodora goes to a nunnery and confesses her sin to the abbess. Nevertheless, she does not stay in the nunnery to repent for her sin as a woman, but cross-dresses in order to enter a male monastery and perform her penitence there as a monk (*VTheodAI* p. 26–27).

The hagiographers of cross-dressers seem to have a strong need to justify their heroines' decision to enter a male monastery. This need can be seen in the various methods they employ. As mentioned above, they feel obliged to give the reasons for the cross-dressing acts of their heroines and for their entry into male monasteries. In some cases they even present the entry to a male monastery as the only possible way of allowing their heroines to lead a religious life. They overpraise the deeds of the holy women who undertake the role of the cross-dresser (cf. the

example of Xanthopoulos mentioned above, p. 91). By paraphrasing, quoting or implicitly referring to Christ's demand that His followers should "leave themselves behind", "let themselves be lost for his sake", and "hate their own lives", they aim at showing that the act of female cross-dressing for God's sake is something that Christ Himself wanted His female followers to undertake. All these techniques might be read as a form of veiled excuse for an act which is "abominable to God": "No woman shall wear an article of man's clothing, nor shall a man put on woman's dress; for those who do these things are abominable to the Lord your God" (Deut. 22.5).

The making of the heroines' male appearance begins in a private space which in most cases is a room in the house of the heroines' parents. These heroines, either alone or with someone else's help, change their female appearance secretly into a male appearance by performing successively two or three acts: they cut short their long hair and change the female type of their clothes into male. In some cases a third act is introduced whereby the heroines remove from their bodies the jewellery they wear. The heroines' disguise does not take up more than two sentences:

And after taking off her woman's clothing and dressing as a man, she [Euphrosyne] went out of the house late in the evening.

Καὶ ἀποδυσαμένη τὴν γυναικείαν στολὴν καὶ ἐνδυσσάμενη ἀνδρείαν, ἐσπέρας βαθείας ἐξῆλθε τοῦ οἴκου. (*VEuphr* ch.9.3–5)

The [father], [...] cut off the hair of her head and dressed her in the clothing of a man. (tr. Constan 1996: 7)

Ὁ δὲ [...] ἀποθρίξας τὴν κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς καὶ ἐνδύσας αὐτὴν ἀνδρεῖον σχῆμα... (*VMar* ch.4.25 and 27–28)

She [Theodora] took off the clothes in which she was dressed and the golden ornaments she was wearing and cut her hair off her head; and she put on her husband's clothes.

ἀπεδύσατο τὰ ἱμάτια ἃ ἦν ἐνδεδυμένη καὶ τὸν κόσμον τοῦ χρυσοῦ ὃν ἔφερε καὶ ἐκέειρε τὴν κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς· καὶ ἀνεδύσατο τὰ ἱμάτια τοῦ ἀνδρὸς αὐτῆς. (*VTheodAI* p.27)

As soon as they cross-dress, the heroines give themselves male names which very often are related to their initial female names, i.e. Pelagia-

¹⁰ For the feminisation of the flesh by the Church Fathers, see Bloch 1991: 37–63.

Pelagios and Theodora-Theodore. This might be related to a common monastic practice, according to which a monastic name could begin with the same initial as one's secular name (Talbot 2001: 99). Unlike the other holy cross-dressers, Matrona and Susanna have names which do not have male forms, they thus adopt male names that are very different from their initial names, i.e. Babylas and John. Despite the fact that the name Euphrosyne has a male form (Euphrosynos), both heroines who have this name give themselves completely different names: Smaragdus (Euphrosyne) and John (Euphrosyne the Younger). The male names these four heroines (Matrona, Susanna, Euphrosyne and Euphrosyne the Younger) choose are the names of martyrs. In the case of Matrona, her hagiographer suggests that she adopts the name of the male martyr she aspires to imitate:

She [Matrona] was now completely transformed into a man and bore a man's name, Babylas. For like the valiant and holy martyr of Christ, the holy instructor of those meek and blessed youths, or like Eleazar, the teacher and companion of the seven youths in the Old Testament, so also did Matrona accomplish feats of endurance and asceticism in a frail body. (tr. Featherstone, in Featherstone and Mango 1996: 22–23)

εἰς ἄνδρα μετασχηματισθεῖσαν ὅλην καὶ ἄνδρὸς φέρουσαν ὄνομα Βαβυλᾶς ἐκαλεῖτο· ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος ὁ γενναῖος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἱερόμαρτυς, ὁ ἱεροπρεπὴς καὶ τῶν πραέων καὶ μακαρίων παίδων ἀλείπτῃς, ἣ ὁ τῶν ἐπὶ τὰ παίδων κατὰ τὸν νόμον παιδευτῆς καὶ συναγωνιστῆς Ἑλεάζαρος, οὕτως καὶ αὕτη ἐν ἀσθενοῦντι σώματι τὴν καρτερίαν καὶ τὴν ἀσκήσιν κατώρθωσεν. (*VMatr* ch.4)

The issue of name is an important part of the heroines' new identities: it is a prerequisite for their treatment by the others as men. The male names they adopt allow them to exist socially as men and be placed in male contexts, such as the monasteries they enter. One of the questions the abbots ask the heroines when they arrive at their monasteries is about their names:

The blessed Philip said to her: "What is your name?" And she said: "I am called John." The brothers who were present said: "You have a fine name. May you also acquire its distinction."

λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ μακάριος Φίλιππος· τί τὸ ὄνομά σου· ἡ δὲ εἶπεν· Ἰωάννης καλοῦμαι. οἱ δὲ παρεστῶτες ἀδελφοὶ εἶπον· καλὸν ὄνομα ἔχεις, ἐὰν καὶ τὴν προαίρεσιν κτήσῃ. (*VSus* ch.4)

The heroines' male names also distinguish their new identities as monks and mark the beginning of their monastic lives. In the above passage from the Life of Susanna, the monks associate name with conduct: the name John which means "God's grace", should belong to a person who could lead a godly life. Susanna, who becomes an exemplary monk and finally dies as a martyr, shows that her male name is in accordance with both her conduct and death.

The scene of disguise is the point where the theatrical behaviour of the holy cross-dresser begins. The cenobitic holy cross-dressers' stage is the monastery where they perform before both a number of monks and laypeople who visit their monastery. As for the solitary cross-dressers Pelagia and Euphrosyne the Younger (Euphrosyne becomes both a cenobitic and a solitary cross-dresser), their place of performance is either the cell (Pelagia) or the desert (Euphrosyne the Younger). In the complete isolation of her small cell, Pelagia has herself as the main spectator of her male religious performance. Her second spectator is her hagiographer James (cf. above, Chapter 2).

While in the desert, Euphrosyne the Younger has three spectators of her performance: the desert father whose disciple she becomes, the servant of her actual father who meets her when he is looking for her but does not recognise her and Satan. Satan is the only one who knows about her female identity and therefore cannot be deceived by her male performance which he sees as a mockery of men (*VEuphrLun* ch.14). Eventually Satan manages to stop Euphrosyne's male performance. His knowledge of her secret provides him with the power to do so: he can reveal to her spiritual father the truth about her female identity and thus prove her male performance ineffective. Just before this occurs, Euphrosyne leaves her spiritual father secretly, changes her appearance from male to female, and enters a nunnery.

The heroines' lives in their places of performance (monastic community, isolated cell and desert) do not prove easy: they constitute a long-lasting and painful struggle to which the hagiographers devote a considerable part of the narrative:

And when the day broke, she was asked to water the garden and she watered it after she pumped water from the well. And the third hour came and she chanted with the brothers and she went to the bakery and having rotated the millstone, she ground the wheat and baked the bread; and she chanted the sixth hour and she went to the kitchen and cooked the vegetables. She chant-

ed the ninth hour. And after she offered some service, she chanted the evening hymns. And she was asked to eat some bread and go to sleep. Kneeling in her cell, she entreated God to [be able to] hold this yoke. [...] And she slept crying and the herald knocked and she woke up to chant the matins until the morning. She worked in this way for eight years.

πρωΐας δὲ γενομένης ἐκελεύσθη ποτίσαι τὸν κῆπον καὶ ἐπότισεν αὐτὸν ἀντλή-
σασα· καὶ ἐγένετο ὥρα τρίτη· καὶ ἔψαλλεν μετὰ τῶν ἀδελφῶν καὶ παρεγέ-
νετο εἰς τὸ μαγκιπεῖον καὶ περικάμψασα τὸν μύλον ἤλεσε τὸν σίτον καὶ ὥπι-
σεν τοὺς ἄρτους· καὶ ἔψαλλεν τὴν ἔκτην καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸ μαγειρεῖον καὶ
ἐψήσασα τὸ λάχανον ἔψαλλεν τὴν ἐνάτην καὶ ποιήσασα πρὸς ὑπηρεσίαν
ἔψαλλε τὸ λυχνικόν· καὶ ἐκελεύσθη φαγεῖν ἄρτον καὶ κοιμηθῆναι· ἡ δὲ κλί-
νασα τὰ γόνατα ἐν τῷ κελλίῳ αὐτῆς ἰκέτευε τὸν Θεὸν ὅπως βαστάσῃ τὸν
ζυγὸν τοῦτον [...] καὶ ἐκοιμήθη μετὰ κλαυθμοῦ καὶ ἔκρουσεν ὁ κῆρυξ καὶ ἀνέ-
στη τὸν ὀρθρινὸν ὕμνον ποιῆσαι ἕως πρωΐ· οὕτως δὲ ἐδούλευσεν ἐπὶ ἑτῇ ὀκτώ.
(*VTheodAI* p.29)

Not only do the cenobitic cross-dressers successfully carry out their monastic duties but they even manage to distinguish themselves among all the other monks for their piety and asceticism. Their conduct proves more manly than that of their brothers. As Xanthopoulos, for instance, formulates it, Euphrosyne was a

woman, who having masculinised her weak [female] nature, surpassed many men by brilliantly demonstrating to everybody her male character through her endurance of pain, the purity of her soul and the long path of her ascetic practices.

γυνὴ τὸ ἀσθενὲς ἀρρενώσασα πολλοὺς παρήλασε τῶν ἀνδρῶν, τὸ ἀρρενωπὸν ἐπὶ πᾶσι καθυποφαίνουσα τῇ τε καρτερίᾳ τῶν πόνων καὶ τῷ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀκιβδήλῳ καὶ τῷ μακρῷ τῆς ἀσκήσεως δρόμῳ. (*VEuphrIun* ch.17)

The heroines' monastic lives appear to be so manly that nobody ever suspects that they are women, as the hagiographer of Susanna points out:

It happened that she spent many years, around twenty, in this great conduct and nobody could have known during such a [long] time that she was a woman.

ἐγένετο δὲ χρόνους ἱκανοὺς ποιῆσαι αὐτὴν ἐν τῇ καλλίστῃ ταύτῃ πολιτείᾳ, ὡς περίπου τὰ εἴκοσι ἔτη· καὶ οὐδεὶς ἠδυνήθη τῷ τοσούτῳ χρόνῳ γυνῶναι, ὅτι γυνὴ ὑπῆρχεν. (*VSus* ch.5)

Not even the holiest of abbots, Bassianos, who had the grace of pre-

science, was aware of the presence of a woman in his monastery (*VMatr* ch.6). The heroines' holy conduct results in their total acceptance by the members of their communities who admire them and strive to imitate them:

The multitude of the brethren there marvelled at her struggles, taking into account, as was right, the fact that a eunuch, one frail by nature, endeavoured not only to vie with them in ascetic labours, but strove to do yet more, fasting patiently and taking little nourishment, tempering his anger and resisting desires, abiding in prayer, abounding in love, most eager in obedience, persevering in labours of the earth and, greater than all these things, not giving in to the despair that besets those who practice continence. [...] They strove to imitate and gave heed to her way of life as to a most important lesson. (tr. Featherstone, in Featherstone and Mango 1996: 23)

ἐθαύμαζε τὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν πλῆθος, λογιζόμενον, ὡς εἰκός, ὅτι εὐνοῦχος ἀνὴρ καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἀσθενῆς οὐκ ἐξισοῦσθαι αὐτοῖς μόνον ἐν τοῖς ἀσκητικοῖς πόνοις ἐσπούδαζεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πλέον τι ἔχειν ἐφιλονεῖκει, νηστεύων μὲν καρτερικῶς, τροφῆς δὲ μεταλαμβάνων ὀλίγης, θυμοῦ τε κρατῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμίας μὴ ἀπα-
γόμενος, προσευχῇ προσκαρτερῶν, τῇ ἀγάπῃ πλουτῶν, πρὸς ὑπακοὴν εὐπρό-
θυμος, τοῖς δὲ πόνοις τῆς γῆς ἐγκαρτερῶν καὶ τὸ μείζον τούτων τῇ πολεμοῦσῃ
τοῖς ἐγκρατευομένοις ἀκηδία μὴ χαυνούμενος; [...] μιμεῖσθαι δὲ ἔσπευδον καὶ
ὡς διδασκαλίᾳ μεγίστη προσεῖχον τῇ αὐτῆς πολιτείᾳ. (*VMatr* ch.4)

The heroines' austere ascetic lives provide them with a new appearance which is even more masculine than the appearance they had when they arrived at their monasteries. The forms of their bodies are completely transformed: their initial youth and beauty, which could reveal their female identity to the persons who knew them as women, fade away. Thus Paphnutios, for example, fails to recognise his own daughter: "He did not recognise her at all for her beauty had withered from her abstinence" (ὅλως γὰρ οὐκ ἐγνώρισεν αὐτὴν διὰ τὸ μαρανθῆναι τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς ὑπὸ τῆς ἐγκρατείας. *VEuphr* ch.14.6–7).

When most of the cenobitic cross-dressers reach the peak of their monastic careers and are considered by their fellow monks as perfect monks, unexpected things happen to them: Euphrosyne the Younger is elected abbot of her monastery, Matrona's female identity is revealed, Mary, Susanna and Theodora are accused of being involved in sexual scandals. These incidents change their lives dramatically, since they are immediately forced to leave their monasteries.

For the next thirty-three years of her life, Euphrosyne the Younger/John

performs as a solitary cross-dresser. During this new form of monastic life, Euphrosyne/John is confronted with new difficulties:

But she engages again in new struggles. [...] She did not neglect her bodily pains. [...] For the place was deserted and harsh in every way. [...] Carrying the pot on her shoulders, she brought the water to the father from far away, as much as three miles.

νέων δ' ὅμως ἀγώνων καὶ πάλιν ἄπτεται [...] οὐδὲ τῶν σωματικῶν κόπων ἡμέλει. [...] Ἐρήμου γὰρ καὶ σκληροῦ παντάπασι τοῦ τόπου καθεστηκότος, [...] ἐκεῖνη τὸ κεράμιον τοῖς ὤμοις διαβαστάζουσα καὶ πόρρωθεν ὡς ἀπὸ μιλίων μάλα τριῶν τὸ ὕδωρ τῷ πατρὶ διεκόμεν. (*VEuphrlun* ch.11)

The femaleness of Matrona/Babylas is disclosed by a divine dream both to her abbot Bassianos and to a fellow abbot of his. The truth and divinity of both dreams are confirmed, when after an extended prayer, Bassianos opens the Gospel and finds the following passage:

The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. (Lk. 13.21; tr. Featherstone, in Featherstone and Mango 1996: 26)

Ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ζύμη, ἣν λαβοῦσα γυνὴ ἔκρυπεν εἰς ἀλεύρου σάτα τρία, ἕως οὗ ἐξημώθη ὅλον. (*VMatr* ch.6)

Bassianos reads the above quoted simile as an allegory of Matrona's male performance: the three measures of meal in which the biblical woman hides leaven is the disguise in which Matrona hides her female sex. Matrona's female identity is thus revealed through the same signs which led her to hide her femaleness and enter a male monastery. As mentioned above (p. 101), she decided to cross-dress after having a divine dream which suggested to her that she should find shelter in a male monastery. Like Bassianos, she verified the message of her dream when, after a long prayer, she opened up the Gospel and came upon a passage saying that Christ's followers should deny themselves. This Matrona, as already stated, interpreted as denial of her femaleness.

The revelation of her true sex causes Matrona great regret, since this results in the end of her life as a cenobitic monk:

She moaned, saying, "Woe is me, wretch that I am! For I am cast out as one unworthy. Woe is me, miserable one that I am! For it has been discovered what I am, and I am no longer counted a brother among the brethren; no longer am I thought to be a eunuch, nor to be addressed as Babylas, but

am soon once again to be a woman and to be called Matrona." (tr. Featherstone, in Featherstone and Mango 1996: 26)

στενάζουσα ἔλεγεν· "Οἱμοι τῇ ἀθλίᾳ, ὅτι ἀπορρίπτομαι ὡς ἀναξία· οἱμοι τῇ ταλαιπώρῳ, ὅτι ἐγνώσθη ὃ εἰμι, καὶ οὐκέτι ὡς ἀδελφὸς τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς διαλέγομαι, οὐκέτι ὡς εὐνοῦχος νοοῦμαι καὶ Βαβυλᾶς φωνοῦμαι, ἀλλὰ πάλιν γυνὴ ὀρώμαι καὶ Ματρῶνα καλοῦμαι." (*VMatr* ch.7)

Matrona sees the unmasking of her femaleness and the consequent loss of her male self as a downfall. She falls from the status of a respected monk to that of a woman who is deemed unworthy of being a member of Bassianos' monastic community.

Mary/Marinos, Susanna/John and Theodora/Theodore have a more unpleasant experience than Matrona. They are accused of deflowering other women. Mary/Marinos, Susanna/John and Theodora/Theodore are confronted with the choice of either denying the accusations or of accepting them. Either choice entails certain risks. To reject the accusations endangers the heroines' lives as men, since in order to prove the charges wrong, they have to disclose their female sex. Of course, in this way they avoid punishment. To accept the accusations, on the other hand, affirms their male selves but leads to the loss of their status as exemplary monks and results in harsh punishments.

Susanna/John chooses the first avenue: she proves her innocence by showing her female body naked to four other women who come to the monastery for this reason (*VSus* ch.9). In contrast, not only do the other two heroines not attempt to refute the accusations raised against them, they even admit that they are guilty. When the abbot asks Mary/Marinos whether she deflowered the daughter of an innkeeper, Mary/Marinos falls on the floor and says: "Forgive me, Father, for I have been misled as a human being" (Συγχώρησόν μοι, πάτερ, ὅτι ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐπλανήθην. *VMar* ch.11.89–90).

Being considered unworthy to stay in their communities, Mary/Marinos and Theodora/Theodore are expelled from the monasteries. Both heroines stay outside their monasteries where their marginalisation is exposed to everybody who passes by:

Those entering the monastery used to ask him, "Why are you sitting outdoors?" To which he would reply, "Because I fornicated and have been expelled from the monastery." (tr. Constanas 1996: 9)

Οἱ οὖν εἰσερχόμενοι ἐν τῷ μοναστηρίῳ ἡρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· "Διὰ τί ἔξω

κάθει;" Καὶ ἔλεγεν· "Ὅτι ἐπόρνευσα καὶ ἐξεβλήθην ἐκ τοῦ μοναστηρίου." (VMar ch.12.93–96)

While living outside their monasteries "enduring the freezing cold and the burning heat" (ὕπήμενε τὸ ψῦχος καὶ τὸν καύσωνα. VMar ch.12.93) in order to play the role of the penitent, both heroines are also forced to undertake the role of the father. Each of the women who accused either Mary/Marinos or Theodora/Theodore of impregnating her gives birth to a male child which is left to the alleged father. The raising of the child makes both heroines' lives even harder and their punishment harsher. After some years this punishment is considered sufficient by their fellow monks and the heroines are readmitted to the monastery. They are, however, still regarded as being tainted with sin and therefore they are treated as the lowest of monks. The abbot of Mary/Marinos says to her:

On account of the sin which you have committed, you are not worthy to resume your former position here. Nevertheless, on account of the brethren's love, I accept you back into our ranks, but only as the last and least of all. (tr. Constan 1996: 10)

Οὐκ εἰ ἄξιός στήναι εἰς τὸν πρῶτόν σου τόπον διὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἣν ἔπραξας· διὰ δὲ τὴν ἀγάπην τῶν ἀδελφῶν, δέχομαί σε ὕστερον πάντων εἰς τὸν κανόνα. (VMar ch.16.118–121)

Mary/Marinos is asked to perform the most menial tasks of the monastery followed by her alleged child (VMar ch.17.125–126), whereas Theodora/Theodore is shut up with the child in the innermost cell of the monastery (VTheodAl p.40).

As the examples of Euphrosyne the Younger, Matrona, Susanna, Mary, Theodora and Euphrosyne show, the presence of a woman in a male monastery, albeit disguised, is quite problematic. For Euphrosyne the Younger, Matrona and Susanna it is not possible to spend their whole lives in a male monastic community because they cannot escape from their femaleness, despite the fact that they skilfully hide it. Being a woman, Euphrosyne avoids becoming an abbot and in order to do that, she has to leave the monastery. In the case of Matrona, God appears to wish that her female identity not remain hidden for ever. This fact manifests that as a woman Matrona is in reality not allowed to live among monks, even though she manages to become the exemplary monk. As for Susanna, it is no coincidence that she is the only monk of her community who becomes a laywoman's object of desire, a fact that leads to the end of Susanna's life as a monk.

The other three heroines, Mary, Theodora and Euphrosyne, who never abandon the life of the monk, unwillingly cause serious problems for their monastic communities. By being accused of getting involved in sexual scandals, both Mary and Theodora endanger the good reputation of their monasteries, considered as pious places with monks distinguished for their holiness. The innkeeper whose daughter accuses Mary/Marinos of impregnating her goes to Mary's/Marinos' monastery and shouts the following words:

"Where is that charlatan, that pseudo-Christian, whom you call a Christian?" When one of the stewards came to meet him, he said, "Welcome." But the [innkeeper] replied, "The hour was an evil one in which I made your acquaintance." In like manner he said to the father superior, "May I never see another monk," and other such things. (tr. Constan 1996: 9)

"Ποῦ ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνος ὁ πλάνος, ὁ ψευδοχριστιανός, ὃν λέγετε χριστιανόν;" Ὡς δὲ συνήντησεν αὐτῷ ὁ ἀποκρισάριος, λέγει αὐτῷ· "Καλῶς ἦλθες." Ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔλεγεν· "Κακῇ ὥρᾳ συνέτυχον ὑμῖν". Ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τὸν ἡγούμενον ἔλεγεν ὅτι· "Μὴ γένοιτό μοι ἔτι ἰδεῖν μοναχόν" καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα. (VMar ch.10.70–75)

Euphrosyne, on the other hand, stimulates desire among her fellow monks and is punished for this by being kept in an isolated cell. She is not allowed to participate in the monastery's communal life. Thus, even though she lives within the monastery, her religious life is that of the solitary rather than that of the cenobitic monk. Euphrosyne's presence in a male monastery proves even more dangerous and problematic than that of the other cross-dressers, since it threatens the piety of the other monks.

Remaking: The Second Transformation

Being unable to continue their male performances, the heroines whose femaleness is exposed (Matrona and Susanna) or is about to be disclosed (Euphrosyne the Younger) return to their initial gender role. They become women once more and are recognised as such by just remaking their appearance; "having immediately put away the clothes of men, [...] she wore again the clothes of women" (τὰ τῶν ἀνδρῶν αὐθις ἀποθεμένη [...] γυναικῶν ἀμφίοις πάλιν κοσμεῖται. VEuphrIun ch.16). These heroines' second gender transformation, which is achieved through the single act of changing clothes, is even easier than their first gender trans-

formation for which some more effort was needed.

At the beginning of their religious careers as women all three heroines, Matrona, Susanna and Euphrosyne the Younger, enter a female monastic community and are accepted unconditionally. The superiors of the nunneries are not portrayed as asking them about their names and the reasons that led them to become nuns, as is the case with the abbots of the monasteries which they entered earlier (Matrona and Susanna). These facts make the heroines' entry into a nunnery seem self-evident and more natural than their entry into a male community.

Now in their new monastic environments, the three heroines, who used to be exemplary monks, become exemplary nuns:

Now, having entered that monastery, the blessed Matrona so devoted herself to humility and asceticism and nobility of conduct, and so did she shine with virtues, that the sisters, in their admiration for her life and their love for her on account of her noble struggles and fitting manners, asserted that upon the decease of their mother superior they would submit themselves to her as guide and leader and spiritual mother. (tr. Featherstone, in Featherstone and Mango 1996: 31)

Οὕτως οὖν ἀπελθοῦσα ἡ μακαρία Ματρῶνα εἰς τὸ μοναστήριον, τοσοῦτον τῇ ταπεινώσει καὶ ἀσκήσει καὶ τῇ ἀγαθῇ πολιτείᾳ ἐπέδωκεν ἑαυτὴν καὶ διέλαμψεν ταῖς ἀρεταῖς, ὥς καὶ τὰς ἀδελφὰς θαυμαζοῦσας τὸν βίον αὐτῆς καὶ διὰ τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς καὶ ἐπιεικεῖς αὐτῆς ἀγῶνας καὶ τρόπους ἀγαπῶσας αὐτὴν διίσχυριζομένας λέγειν, ὅτι μετὰ τὴν τελευταίαν τῆς περιούσης αὐτῶν ἡγουμένης ταύτῃ ὑποτάσσουσιν ἑαυτάς καὶ αὐτὴν ἔχειν ὁδηγὸν καὶ ἡγουμένην καὶ μητέρα πνευματικὴν. (*VMatr* ch.11)

The three heroines are destined once again to leave their monastic communities for reasons which are once more related to their identities. As a Christian woman, Susanna is removed from her nunnery and is made to undergo countless tortures. The holy conduct of Matrona and Euphrosyne the Younger as nuns and their ability to perform miracles result in their becoming famous and popular. Very soon their life-stories are revealed and they cannot hide themselves any longer. Matrona is traced by her husband who arrives at her nunnery and looks for her. She runs away secretly but it is impossible for her to hide since her pious conduct is celebrated wherever she goes and her appearance is widely known, facts that allow Dometianos to follow her easily. Eventually Matrona manages to escape by changing not only places but also her clothes:

Hearing that she had betaken herself to the Holy Places (for her fame made her conspicuous everywhere) [...] [Dometianos] came at once to Jerusalem and learned from certain pious women that she was there. For they told him that her stature was tall and fine, her garment of hair, her skin white, and her countenance bright and joyous; and thereby he understood that she was the blessed one, and he inquired after her abode. [...] Now, when the blessed Matrona learned that he had come thither, women dispatched by him having so informed her, she was seized with great fear; and changing her attire she went to the region of Beirut. (tr. Featherstone, in Featherstone and Mango 1996: 32–33, 34)

Ἀκούσας γὰρ αὐτὴν τοῖς ἀγίοις τόποις παραβεβληκέναι, –ἡ γὰρ φήμη πανταχοῦ φανεράν ἐποίει– [...] φθάνει τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα κάκεισε παρά τινων θεοσεβουσῶν γυναικῶν μαθὼν αὐτὴν εἶναι ἔλεγον γὰρ αὐτῷ, ὅτι ἡ μὲν ἡλικία αὐτῆς ὑψηλὴ ἐστὶν καὶ ἀναλόγως κειμένη, τὸ δὲ φόρεμα τρίχινον, τὸ δὲ χρῶμα λευκόν, τὸ δὲ πρόσωπον ἰλαρὸν καὶ τερπνόν. Ἐκ τούτων οὖν συνεῖς αὐτὴν εἶναι τὴν μακαρίαν, τὸ ταύτης καταγώγιον ἐπυνθάνετο. [...] Μαθοῦσα δὲ ἡ μακαρία Ματρῶνα κάκεισε αὐτὸν ἐληλυθέναι, γυναικῶν αὐτῇ μηνυσασῶν παρ' αὐτοῦ ἀπεσταλμένων, φόβῳ συσχεθεῖσα πολλῶ, τὴν ἐσθῆτα μεταμφιασμένη παραγίνεται εἰς τὰ μέρη Βηρυτοῦ. (*VMatr* ch.14)

Disguise thus plays an important role in the case of Matrona, since it is the means through which she manages to flee from Dometianos. In particular, male disguise has for Matrona even further significance, strongly related to her concept of religious life. Later in her Life, she is presented as changing the form of her attire once more (though not to avoid Dometianos who, after Matrona's arrival in Beirut, disappears from the plot of the Life). The change occurs when Matrona, having founded her own monastic community with rules based on that of her former abbot Bassianos, receives from Bassianos the clothes which she and the members of her community should wear. These are male girdles of dark leather and male white cloaks (*VMatr* ch.51), exactly the monastic attire Matrona used to wear while she was a monk of Bassianos' community.

After Euphrosyne the Younger has become famous in an attempt to hide herself she gives up her role as a cenobitic nun and undertakes the role of the solitary. In doing so she acts in the same way as she did when she left her first monastic community. Now as a woman she cannot lead her solitary life in the desert, a place which is reserved for male solitaries, but in an isolated cell that she builds under the earth (*VEuphr-*

Iun ch.16). She does not, however, manage to remain hidden; many people arrive from afar to receive her blessings and be instructed by her. One of them is the emperor who visits her regularly. Wishing to avoid her worldly fame and to be entirely alone so that she can be wholly devoted to God, Euphrosyne secretly moves to another cell which has the dimensions of a tomb. There she undergoes an even harsher ascetic life than before (*VEuphrIun* ch.28). The emperor, who is looking for her, finally manages to find out where she is. He visits her and tries unsuccessfully to convince her to leave her cell (*VEuphrIun* chs.29–31). Eventually in order to avoid the turmoil of a Scythian attack, Euphrosyne again abandons her cell and moves to an even smaller one, where after renewed hard ascetic practices she becomes seriously ill and dies (*VEuphrIun* chs.34–36).

As is obvious, all three heroines, Susanna, Matrona and Euphrosyne the Younger, have rather more adventurous lives as nuns than as monks. As a nun, Susanna is arrested and led to martyrdom. She has to testify for her faith and undergoes one torture after another until she dies. The nun Matrona is continuously chased by her husband of whom she is afraid and always has to travel alone. Euphrosyne the Younger also behaves like someone who is chased; her enemy is worldly fame, which she tries to avoid by changing cells.

Unmaking: The Unmasking of the Cross-Dressers' Sex

In the case of Euphrosyne, Marina, Mary, Pelagia and Theodora, male monastic attire and performance function as a means of hiding their femaleness until the time of their deaths. Since these heroines begin and end their religious careers as monks, either solitary or cenobitic, the role of the cross-dresser impels and structures the entire narrative of their Lives. The development of the plots of these holy women's Lives is almost exclusively based on the performance of the religious role of the cross-dresser.¹¹

Even though these heroines pass as monks until the end of their monastic careers and their earthly lives, the need for the uncovering of their female sex is as acute as it is in the Lives of the cross-dressers whose

sex is revealed during their lifetime. The unmasking of the cross-dressers' sex, either before or after their death, is a vital constituent of the narrative. The narratives examined here are structured and developed in a way that leads to the revelation of the heroines' sex, which is expected from the audiences of the Lives. That their lives as monks prove problematic for most of the heroines discussed here, creates a need for the disclosure of their female selves which allows the main plots or subplots of the texts to reach the necessary closures.

The only Life among the ones discussed here in which the uncovering of the female self does not constitute an issue is that of Marina. This occurs because Marina/Marinos is not confronted with any of the problems that the other heroines have in their monasteries. She is accused neither of arousing erotic desire (Euphrosyne) nor of having any erotic relations (Mary, Susanna, Theodora). She is not elected abbot (Euphrosyne the Younger) and her femaleness is not exposed by a divine sign (Matrona). As mentioned earlier, Marina/Marinos voluntarily abandons her male monastic community some months before her death with the intention of returning to her home-town and dying there. Thus the events which would have made the disclosure of Marina's sex in the course of the narrative necessary are absent from the Life.

Inevitably, in the Lives of the heroines who die as monks, the revelation of their true sex occurs towards the end of these texts' plots. In other words, the closure of the narrative coincides with the uncovering of the heroines' female identities. As soon as the heroines' relatives and/or fellow monks become aware of their femaleness, the plots of their Lives are brought to an end. Euphrosyne's father Paphnutios at last finds his lost daughter, while Theodora's husband finds his lost wife. The innocence of both Mary and Theodora is proved, while the persons who accused them are "rightly" punished and justice thus is given.

The place where the heroines' femaleness is disclosed is their deathbed. Their female sex is revealed either just before they die (Euphrosyne and Theodora) or immediately after their deaths (Mary and Pelagia). In most cases the heroines' femaleness is betrayed by their bodies which are uncovered and exposed to the male gaze while they are prepared for burial. The only heroine who avoids the exposure of her naked body is Euphrosyne. After she has revealed her identity to her father, she asks him to prepare her body for burial himself and not let anybody else touch or see it (*VEuphr* ch.17.6–7). The other heroines' sex, which they man-

¹¹ The Life of Pelagia constitutes the only exception, since there substantial narrative space is devoted to her role as a prostitute (cf. above, Chapter 2).

aged to hide throughout their whole lives under a monk's cassock and through their pious performances, is revealed by their naked bodies which function as signs strongly related to their true identities. In the Lives of Mary, Pelagia and Theodora, the naked female body acts out an important narrative function; it is the means that leads the plot to the necessary closure. The naked female body plays a vital role also in the Life of Susanna. It is the medium through which her innocence is proved and the continuation of her religious career is enabled. In the example of Susanna, the display of her breasts before other pious women brings to an end a subplot of the Life and marks the beginning of a new subplot in which Susanna undertakes another role of female sanctity.

The scenes in which the heroines' femaleness is uncovered are highly theatrical:

Thus Paphnutios went and fell upon the low bed where Smaragdus was laid and kissed him tenderly saying: "Pray for me, brother, my lord, that God may give me consolation for my child, because my soul has not yet been healed from distress." [...] She said to him: "Since God arranged my affairs according to his will and fulfilled my wish, I want you from today to be without grief on account of your daughter Euphrosyne. For I, the humble, am she. [...] I made an arrangement with the abbot that, because I have a large fortune, I would give it to this place if I should be raised up spiritually. So do now give it to the monastery [...]" When Paphnutios heard these things, he was paralysed by surprise and fell on the floor as if he were dead. Agapios came running and threw water on his face. As soon as he made him come to his senses, he said: "What is wrong, my lord?" And he said: "Let me die here, for I saw wondrous things today." He stood and fell upon her holy face and moistened it with tears; he shouted saying: "Woe is me, my sweetest child. [...]" On hearing this Agapios staying speechless, ran crying to the abbot to tell him what had happened. The abbot came quickly and fell upon her holy corpse and shouted saying: "Bride of Christ..."

Ἀπελθὼν οὖν ὁ Παφνούτιος καὶ ἐπιπεσὼν τῷ σκιμποδίῳ ἐν ᾧ ἀνέκειτο ὁ Σμάραγδος, κατεφίλει αὐτὸν λέγων· "Εὖξαι ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, κύρι ἀδελφέ, ἵνα δώῃ μοι ὁ Θεὸς παραμυθίαν περὶ τοῦ τέκνου μου, ὅτι οὐπω ἀπεθεραπεύθη ἡ ψυχὴ μου τῆς λύπης." [...] Λέγει αὐτῷ· "Ἐπειδὴ ὁ Θεὸς ᾧκονόμησεν τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ ὡς ἠθέλησεν, καὶ ἐπλήρωσεν τὴν ἐμὴν ἐπιθυμίαν, βούλομαι λοιπὸν ἄλυτον εἶναί σε ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερον χάριν τῆς θυγατρὸς σου Εὐφροσύνης. Ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι ἡ ταπεινή. [...] Ἐπειδὴ δὲ συνεταξάμην τῷ ἡγουμένῳ ὅτι ἔχω πράγματα πολλὰ καὶ εἰ οἰκοδομηθῶ δίδωμι αὐτὰ εἰς τὸν τόπον τοῦτον, δὸς αὐτὰ τῷ κοινοβίῳ. [...] Ὡς οὖν ἤκουσεν ταῦτα ὁ Παφνούτιος, ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκπλήξεως παρελύ-

θη καὶ ἔπεσεν χαμαὶ ὡσεὶ νεκρὸς. Δραμὼν δὲ ὁ Ἀγάπιος καὶ ὕδωρ προσενέγκας αὐτοῦ τῇ ὀφει, ἀνέστησεν αὐτὸν λέγων· "Τί ἔχεις, κύρι;" Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· "Ἐάσατέ με ὥδε ἀποθανεῖν, ὅτι εἶδον παράδοξα πράγματα σήμερον." Ἀναστὰς οὖν καὶ ἐπιπεσὼν τῷ ἀγίῳ αὐτῆς προσώπῳ καὶ δάκρυσι τοῦτο βρέχων, ἐβόα λέγων· "Οἱμοι, τέκνον μου γλυκύτατον. [...]" Ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ Ἀγάπιος καὶ ἐνεὸς γενόμενος, κλαίων ἔδραμε πρὸς τὸν ἡγούμενον τὰ τοῦ πράγματος ἀναγγέλλων. Ἐλθὼν οὖν ὁ ἡγούμενος ἐν σπουδῇ καὶ ἐπιπεσὼν τῷ ἀγίῳ αὐτῆς σκηνώματι, ἔκραξεν λέγων· "Νύμφη Χριστοῦ..." (*VEuphr* ch.16.28–31, ch.17.2–5 and 7–9, ch.18.13–18, ch.19.23–26)

The hagiographer of Euphrosyne creates such a lively scene in the above passage that it gives the impression that it is enacted on a stage before the reader's or the listener's eyes. The setting is Euphrosyne's/Smaragdus' cell where there is a low bed on which the sick heroine is lying. This scene is entered and left by different persons for various reasons. The first person who comes into the cell is Paphnutios. The purpose of his visit is to receive final emotional support from the dying monk. As soon as he enters the cell, Paphnutios falls next to Euphrosyne's/Smaragdus' bed and begins kissing the dying monk.

When Paphnutios is informed that the person consoling him for the loss of his daughter is his own daughter, he experiences such a strong feeling of surprise that he faints. At this moment another person enters the scene, Agapios, who tries to make him recover. When Paphnutios comes to his senses, he is a different person: he is morally converted. Being edified by the holy conduct of his daughter, whom, as he now realises, he had in fact never lost, he is prepared to stay in her cell forever and die there. Fulfilling Euphrosyne's will, he later gives a great part of his possessions to the monastery and distributes the rest to other monasteries, churches and poor-houses. He finally moves to his daughter's cell where he stays until his death ten years later. He is then buried beside his daughter (*VEuphr* ch.21).

Through Paphnutios' laments over the body of his dead daughter, Agapios, too becomes aware of a new knowledge, which also has the effect on him of surprise rendering him speechless. Now he knows that Smaragdus, whose tutor he has been, is not a man but a woman and, in addition, that she is the lost daughter of the man she has been consoling for so many years. Agapios' first reaction is to leave the cell. He runs to the abbot with the intention of sharing with him his new and unexpected knowledge. The abbot, in turn, comes into the cell in order to

lament over the heroine's dead body and to ask her not to forget her fellow monks and to intercede so that they may also reach the state of holiness (*VEuphr* ch.19.26–30).

The moral transformation which Paphnutios undergoes is also experienced by Theodora's husband who, after her death and burial, enters her cell where he leads a pious life until he dies. As is the case with Paphnutios, whose corpse is placed next to that of his beloved daughter, the dead body of Theodora's husband is buried next to that of Theodora. The knowledge that both men acquire concerning the conduct of the heroines changes their lives dramatically; they undergo a reversal. The two men are released from the great distress that the heroines' disappearance from their lives caused them. They also give up their secular lives and become monks.

In the closure of Mary's Life the effects of the feeling of surprise are also intense. Mary's/Marinos' fellow monks are startled to find a female body under the cassock of the monk Marinos:

Going to his cell, they found him dead, and informed the superior, saying, "Brother Marinos has died". But the [superior] said, "In what state did his wretched soul depart? What defence can he make for the sin that he committed?" [Having thus spoken, the superior then] directed that [Marinos] be buried. But as they were preparing to wash him, they discovered that he was a woman, and shrieking, they all began to cry out in a single voice, "Lord have mercy". The superior, hearing their cries asked them, "What troubles you so?" And they said, "Brother Marinos is a woman." Drawing near and seeing [for himself], the [superior] cast himself down at her feet, and with many tears cried out, "Forgive me, for I have sinned against you. I shall lie dead here at your holy feet until such time as I hear forgiveness for all the wrongs that I have done you." And while he was uttering many such lamentations, as well as things yet more remarkable, a voice spoke to him saying, "Had you acted knowingly, this sin would not be forgiven you. But since you acted unknowingly, your sin is forgiven." The superior thereupon sent [word] to the innkeeper to come and see him. When he arrived, the superior said to him, "Marinos is dead." The innkeeper replied, "May God forgive him, for he has made of my house a desolation." But the superior said to him, "You must repent, brother, for you have sinned before God. You also incited me by your words, and for your sake I also sinned, for Marinos is a woman." Hearing this, the innkeeper was astonished and wondered greatly at his words. And the superior took the innkeeper and showed him that [Marinos] was a woman. At this [the innkeeper] began to lament and to marvel at what had happened. (tr. Constanas 1996: 11)

Ἀπελθόντων δὲ αὐτῶν εἰς τὸ κελλίον αὐτοῦ, εὗρον αὐτὸν τελειωθέντα καὶ ἀπὴγγειλαν τῷ ἡγουμένῳ λέγοντες ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφὸς Μαρῖνος ἐτελειώθη. Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· "Ἄρα πῶς ἀπῆλθεν ἡ ἀθλία ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ; Ποίαν ἀπολογίαν ἔχει δοῦναι περὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ἧς ἐπραξεν;" Προσέταξε δὲ κηδευσθῆναι αὐτόν. Καὶ ὥς ἦλθον ἀπολοῦσαι αὐτόν, εὗρον ὅτι γυνὴ ἐστὶ καὶ ἐθροήθησαν καὶ ἤρξαντο πάντες κρᾶζειν καὶ λέγειν μιᾷ φωνῇ· "Κύριε ἐλέησον". Ὁ δὲ ἡγούμενος ἀκούσας ἡρώτα αὐτοὺς λέγων· "Τί ἐστὶν ὃ ἔχετε;" Οἱ δὲ εἶπον· "'Ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφὸς Μαρῖνος γυνὴ ἐστὶν'. Ἐλθὼν οὖν καὶ ἰδὼν ἔρριπεν ἑαυτὸν χαμαὶ εἰς τοὺς πόδας αὐτῆς μετὰ δακρύων πολλῶν βοῶν καὶ λέγων· "Συγχώρησόν μοι ὅτι ἡμαρτον εἰς σέ· ὥδε ἀποθνήσκω εἰς τοὺς ἀγίους σου πόδας ἕως οὗ ἀκούσω συγχώρησιν ὧν ἐπλημμέλησα εἰς σέ". Καὶ πολλὰ τοιαῦτα καὶ πλείονα τούτων ὀδυρομένου, ἦλθεν αὐτῷ φωνὴ λέγουσα· "Εἰ μὲν εἰδὼς τοῦτο ἐπραξας, οὐκ ἂν συνεχωρήθῃ σοι ἡ ἁμαρτία· ὅτι δὲ μὴ εἰδὼς τοῦτο ἐπραξας, συνεχωρήθῃ σοι ἡ ἁμαρτία". Ἐπεμψε δὲ ὁ ἡγούμενος πρὸς τὸν πάνδοχα τοῦ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς αὐτὸν καί, ἐλθόντος αὐτοῦ, λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ ἡγούμενος· "Ἴδου ὁ Μαρῖνος ἀπέθανεν". Ὁ δὲ πάνδοχος λέγει· "Ὁ Θεὸς συγχώρησιν αὐτόν, ὅτι ἔρημον τὸν οἶκόν μου κατέστησεν". Λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ ἡγούμενος· "Μετανόησον, ἀδελφέ, ὅτι ἡμαρτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ· κάμῃ γὰρ τοῖς λόγοις σου συνεπῆρες καὶ ἡμαρτον ἐνεκέν σου· ὁ γὰρ Μαρῖνος γυνὴ ἐστὶν". Ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ πάνδοχος ἐκπληκτος γενόμενος ἐθαύμαζεν ἐπὶ τοῖς λεγομένοις. Καὶ λαθὼν αὐτὸν ὁ ἡγούμενος ἔδειξεν αὐτόν ὅτι γυνὴ ἐστὶν. Ἦρξατο οὖν κάκεινος ὀδύρεσθαι καὶ θαυμάζειν ἐπὶ τῷ γεγονότι. (*VMar* chs.18–20.139–167)

This passage contains the theatrical elements which also appear in the scene of recognition from the Life of Euphrosyne.¹² In both cases the scene takes place in the heroine's cell where she lies dead. Mary's cell, like that of Euphrosyne, is entered by various people for different reasons. First some of the heroine's fellow monks come to her cell in order to see how she is and find her dead. Their first reaction is to inform their superior about it. The abbot's response to Mary/Marinos' death is highly ironic and this was most probably perceived by the audience of the Life. In the abbot's eyes Mary/Marinos is a sinner who lost the chance of salvation. He changes his mind about Mary/Marinos when his monks tell him that Marinos is a woman. He then enters her cell in order to verify this new and surprising information by seeing her naked body with his own eyes. His conversion which follows is quite spectacular. Like Paphnutios, he falls beside the heroine's corpse and begins to lament. He is determined to die there unless he receives forgiveness. A reversal

¹² For scenes of recognition in medieval hagiography, see Boulhol 1996.

of roles now takes place; the abbot is the sinner and not Mary, whom the abbot now treats as a saint.

As soon as he receives the forgiveness he is waiting for, the abbot calls for the innkeeper. When the innkeeper arrives a situation is created similar to the one that followed after the abbot became aware of Mary's/Marinos' death. Without revealing Mary's/Marinos' sex, the abbot informs the innkeeper about her death. Like the abbot earlier, the innkeeper treats Mary/Marinos as sinful and wishes that God forgive her/him. Here again, the effect of irony is repeated, in this case experienced both by the persons of the narrative (abbot and monks) and the audience of the Life. When the abbot tells the innkeeper that Marinos is a woman, he is greatly surprised. He then enters Mary's cell in order to see with his own eyes the truth concerning Mary's sex. After seeing, he is transformed too.

The revelation of Euphrosyne's, Mary's, Pelagia's and Theodora's female sex is followed by public recognition. The abbots, the brethren and/or members of different monastic communities celebrate the heroines' religious triumphs. The miracles performed on their corpses increase everybody's admiration for their conduct which led them to holiness:

And she was immediately healed at the tomb of the blessed Mary and everyone glorified God because of this sign, and because of [Mary's] patient endurance, for she vigorously endured [her trials] until death, refusing to make herself known. (tr. Constan 1996: 12)

Καὶ παραχρῆμα ἰάθη ἐν τῷ μνήματι τῆς ὁσίας Μαρίας καὶ πάντες ἐδόξαζον τὸν Θεὸν ἐπὶ τῷ γεγονότι σημείῳ καὶ τῇ ὑπομονῇ αὐτῆς, ὅτι μέχρι θανάτου ἐκατέρησε, μὴ φανερώσασα ἑαυτήν. (*VMar* ch.21.171–174)

As their Lives show, holy cross-dressers successfully perform both genders. This becomes more striking in the cases of the heroines who at some point of the narrative give up their lives as men and become once again women by just remaking their appearance. The holy cross-dressers who can act as both exemplary monks and nuns manifest that being a nun is as much a performance as being a monk. The enactment of both roles is a matter of changing clothes and place of activity (male monastery is replaced by a nunnery). In the Lives of the holy cross-dressers, religious performance meets social performance, since the role of the cross-dresser is performed in a religious environment by imitation of the male gender that is a social role.

CHAPTER 4

Life in the Nunnery:

The Exemplary Body of the Abbess and the Obedient Body of the Nun

Introduction

Female monastic tradition in Byzantium differed from the corresponding male tradition. The majority of female monastics adopted the cenobitic life (Morris 1995: 52). Women were not encouraged to lead the life of the hermit and therefore, unlike their male counterparts, they never created "cities in the deserts" or on the mountains. In fact, male monastic tradition has its very roots in eremitic life, which was established by Antony. Thus while during the first Christian centuries many holy men, following the example of Antony, moved to the desert seeking a life of contemplation, their female counterparts—such an example is Macrina—transformed their houses into nunneries instead (Chitty 1966; Brown 1988).

The historical reality according to which women did not favour the life of the hermit is reflected in the Lives of female monastics, as heroines who are solitaires are very few and most of them are fictional.¹ As for the male monastics, many of them seem to prefer the solitary to the cenobitic life. Nevertheless, they do not fail to spend parts of their religious lives both in monasteries and in the wilderness, because as Basil, the hagiographer of Euthymios the Younger, formulates it, "it is not good to lead only the life of a hermit" (*VEuthymIun* ch.27.27–28; date: 910).

Thus a common motif of male monastic Lives is the central heroes' experiences of different styles of monasticism which combine the solitary and the cenobitic life. Euthymios the Younger, for instance, begins

¹ There are only eight female monastics out of twenty-six whose accounts belong to the subgenre of the female Life. These women are the following: Melania, Pelagia, Taïsia, Mary of Egypt, Synkletike, Matrona, Theoktiste and Euphrosyne the Younger.

his monastic career on Mount Olympos in Bithynia as a disciple of a famous hermit, Ioannikios, who initiates him in the ascetic and contemplative life (*VEuthymIun* ch.7). After some time he leaves Ioannikios and becomes a disciple of another famous hermit, John. At some point, after teaching Euthymios everything about a monk's life, John sends him to a monastery, considering him pious enough to enter a monastic community where he could serve other monks and compete with them in spiritual battles (*VEuthymIun* chs.8–9). After spending some time in the monastery, Euthymios returns to the solitary life (*VEuthymIun* ch.12). Much later he experiences the lavriot form of monasticism, a combination of solitary and loose cenobitic life. After that he founds a monastery and becomes the abbot (*VEuthymIun* ch.32). He stays in his monastery for fourteen years, teaching and looking after the members of his community but longing for solitary life he thereafter leaves the monastery and ascends a column. He soon comes down from the column as a result of not being able to find the *hesychia* he seeks. He then goes to Mount Athos where he ends his earthly life as a hermit.

Such a multifarious monastic life as that of Euthymios the Younger is quite uncommon for a female monastic (Talbot 1985). Among all the female monastics, only Melania, Matrona and Euphrosyne the Younger experience both the cenobitic and the solitary life; and not in the ways in which a monk such as Euthymios the Younger does. The lavriot monastic style and the ascent to a column, for example, are forms of ascetic life which are never adopted by the central heroines of female Lives. In contrast to their male counterparts, female solitaires do not travel from one holy mountain to another. With the exception of Euphrosyne the Younger (when she is a cross-dresser), Mary of Egypt and Theoktiste—whose fictitious Life is modelled on that of Mary of Egypt—who wander alone in the wilderness, the other female solitaires enclose themselves in cells.

Unlike holy men who, as the example of Euthymios the Younger shows, give up their role as abbots and abandon their monasteries, holy women retain their role as abbesses until the end of their lives. Despite the principle of “monastic stability”, according to which a monk or a nun should remain in the monastery where he or she first took monastic vows (Talbot 1996b: 194, n. 175), many holy men choose to lead their cenobitic lives in different monasteries. Such an example is Michael Maleinos (*VMichMal BHG* 1295). Holy men of the late Byzantine

period in particular are characterised by their wanderlust (Nicol 1985).

The cenobitic nuns venerated in Byzantine Lives, on the other hand, remaining faithful to the principle of “monastic stability”, never change one nunnery for another, not even if asked by male religious authorities to do so, as in the unique case of Theodora of Thessalonike. According to Theodora's Life, the *archimandrite* John, being aware of her piety, wants to transfer her from the convent of Saint Stephen to another nunnery in order to appoint her its abbess. Referring to the principle of “monastic stability”, Theodora argues against such a decision. She exclaims: “It is impossible for me, a sinful woman, to become a transgressor of my vows to God and to leave this convent where I made my vows” (tr. Talbot 1996b: 194; ἀδύνατον ἐμὲ τὴν ἀμαρτωλὸν παραβάτιν τῶν πρὸς Θεὸν συνθηκῶν μου γενέσθαι καὶ καταλιπεῖν τοῦτο τὸ μοναστήριον, ἔνθα μου τὰς συνθήκας πεποίημαι. *VTheodThess* ch.36.10–13).

The fact that monks have various monastic experiences imposes on their Lives certain structures which are absent from the Lives of nuns and female solitaires. The Life of a nun who spends all her religious life in a convent, for instance, has a different form from that of a monk who travels, enters many monasteries and changes monastic styles according to his spiritual needs. Since a nun and an abbess do not abandon their convents, their Lives, unlike those of most cenobitic monks, are focused almost exclusively on their cenobitic experiences and the incidents that occur within the barriers of their nunneries. Of course there are parallels between the life of a cenobitic monk or an abbot and that of a cenobitic nun or an abbess. Both a monk and a nun have to obey their superiors. An abbot and an abbess have to teach the members of their communities in both words and actions. However, these similarities between the cenobitic monks and nuns, abbots and abbesses are not presented in the same way in male and female Lives. A nun's obedience and an abbess' exemplary role, i.e. their cenobitic tasks, and their roles in the nunnery are more emphasised than those of a monk and an abbot, who also undertake other activities which are not directly relevant to their lives in the cenobium.

In this chapter two roles of female sainthood will be examined: the abbess and the nun. These two roles of female holiness are investigated together not only because they are enacted simultaneously in a convent but also because the realisation of the one role presupposes the

existence of the other. An abbess needs the presence of at least two nuns in order to be able to carry out her tasks as a spiritual guide and director of the convent. The nun, on the other hand, has to be under the supervision and the disciplinary control of a pious and exemplary abbess in order to learn how to exercise herself against temptations and to acquire the virtues of obedience, *apatheia* and humility.

It is not only the nun who has to discipline herself but also the abbess who, being aware of her difficult mission as the spiritual guide of many women and of her responsibility for their salvation, feels obliged to discipline her body and her behaviour. As the following analysis will demonstrate, the abbess' life in the convent is a continuous struggle to achieve a self and a body which I call "exemplary". Through her extremely strict ascetic life and her edifying speeches, the abbess aims at providing her nuns with the means that will enable them to reach salvation. While the nuns look to their abbess' body and behaviour for the exercise of their own bodies and selves, the abbess in turn constantly observes her nuns to verify whether or not they behave according to the monastic canon. In fact, the abbess has the divine ability to read her nuns' thoughts and to see all their actions. If a nun misbehaves or fails to fulfil her duties, she is punished. Thus, the nun learns to discipline herself not only by observing her abbess' exemplary conduct achieved through self-discipline but also by being aware of the fact that she is under her abbess' constant surveillance.

This presentation of an abbess' and a nun's cenobitic behaviour and bodily performances is valid both for the Life in which the central heroine undertakes the role of the abbess and for the Life where the main heroine enacts the role of the nun. There are, however, certain differences in the depiction of these two roles between the Life of an abbess and that of a nun, as the following analysis will seek to show. These differences are created according to who is the central heroine. If she is an abbess, the emphasis is placed on her own religious performance and if she is a nun, on the piety she obtains through her abbess' instructions.

The roles of the abbess and the nun are undertaken by fourteen holy women. One of them, Irene of Chrysobalanton (*VIrChrys BHG* 952; date: after 980), enacts both roles in their development. Nine female saints are abbesses and four are nuns. The abbesses are: Macrina (*VMacr BHG* 1012; date: 380, 382/383), Melania (*VMel BHG* 1241; date: after

439 and before 485), Olympias (*VOl BHG* 1374; date: fifth or sixth century), Eusebia/Xene (*VEusebX BHG* 633; date: fifth century), Matrona (*VMatr BHG* 1221; date: around 550), Eudokia (*VEud BHG* 604; date unknown), Domnika (*VDom BHG* 562; date unknown), Athanasia of Aegina (*VAthAeg BHG* 180; date: tenth century), Elisabeth the Wonderworker (*VELisThaum BHG* 2121; date: between the ninth and the eleventh centuries).² Two of the nuns, Febronia (*PFeb BHG* 659; date: seventh century) and Anastasia the Virgin (*PAnastV BHG* 76z; date unknown), undertake also the role of the martyr. The other nuns are Eupraxia (*VEupr BHG* 631; date: fifth century) and Theodora of Thessalonike (*VTheodThess BHG* 1737; date: 894).

In the present chapter, only the Lives of two abbesses and four nuns will be discussed. The abbesses are Melania and Irene of Chrysobalanton. I have chosen the Lives of these two abbesses because they illustrate in great detail the "exemplary body of the abbess", which is one of the subjects of this chapter. One Life of a nun has been excluded: the Life of Anastasia the Virgin. This Life is not discussed here because the literary treatment of Anastasia and her portrayal as a nun resemble those of Febronia, which are more detailed. The Life of Anastasia the Virgin was modelled on Febronia's Life which was popular in the Middle Ages and was used as a source for later texts (Halkin 1973: 158; Brock and Ashbrook-Harvey 1987: 151).

Melania's Life has come down to us in Greek and Latin versions and it was written by Melania's disciple Gerontios, a monophysite monk who died around 485 (Clark 1984: 13–24; Gorce 1962: 54–62). According to Adhémar d'Alès (1906), the original Life was written in Greek about nine years after Melania's death. The versions in Greek and Latin that have survived constitute later reworkings of the Greek original written by Gerontios. According to her Greek Life, Melania comes from an extremely rich and noble Roman family. Seeking to ensure heirs to their vast fortune, Melania's parents marry her off at an early age to the son of a Roman prefect, thus ignoring her desire to remain a virgin and devote herself entirely to God. After the death of their two children, Melania and her husband decide to live in chastity and to sell their

² As we are informed by their hagiographers, Eudokia, Domnika, Athanasia of Aegina and Elisabeth spend part of their monastic careers as nuns. However, they are not depicted enacting the role of the nun in its development.

properties in order to distribute the money to the poor. For this reason Melania and her husband travel to the areas where they possess lands and slaves. After selling off their lands and slaves, they visit holy hermits, found nunneries and monasteries and engage in ascetic practices. Melania's ascetic life, as mentioned above (p. 128), is a combination of the life in solitude and that in a cenobium. She dies from illness and in complete poverty.

According to her anonymous *Life*,³ Irene of Chrysobalanton is a young woman who in the company of her sister leaves her homeland, Capadocia, in order to go to Constantinople, with the intention of participating in the bride-show that the empress Theodora organises for her son Michael III (842–867). On the way, the two sisters visit Ioannikios, the famous hermit, who appears to know Irene's name and who tells her that the nuns of the Chrysobalanton convent need her protection. When Irene and her sister reach Constantinople, Michael's future wife has already been selected. Irene's sister marries caesar Bardas, while Irene, recalling Ioannikios' words, enters the convent of Chrysobalanton where she is singled out for her piety and obedience. After the abbess' death, Irene becomes her successor. As an abbess, Irene hardens her ascetic practices. She acquires the gift of reading her nuns' thoughts, and she performs various miracles.

Eupraxia's *Life* is also anonymous. Eupraxia is the daughter of Antigonos, a kinsman of emperor Theodosius I (379–395) and a pious woman, Eupraxia. After Antigonos' death the emperor takes the widow Eupraxia and her daughter under his protection. When the little girl reaches the age of five, Theodosius betroths her to the son of a rich senator. Some time later one of the senators, assisted by the empress, asks the widow Eupraxia to marry him. Eupraxia, who renounces sexual life while her husband is alive, rejects the proposal. When the emperor is informed that his wife has tried to arrange a marriage for the pious Eupraxia, he becomes angry and has an argument with the empress. As soon as Eupraxia hears that the emperor and the empress have had an argument because of her, she takes her daughter and goes to Egypt. She settles down in the Thebaid. In a nearby town there is a nunnery which Eupraxia and her daughter visit frequently. At some point the

³ On the historical context of the *Life* of Irene of Chrysobalanton and on issues referring to the text's date and authorship, see Rosenqvist 1986: xxiii–xliii.

young Eupraxia decides to stay in the nunnery permanently by adopting the habit of a nun. Eupraxia appears to be a pious and obedient nun, who is frequently tempted by the Devil. She manages to drive the Devil away by confessing her temptations to the abbess and by performing hard and humbling tasks. Eupraxia's spirituality reaches such high levels that she begins performing miracles. Before Eupraxia's death the abbess has a vision in which the Virgin informs her that Eupraxia will be received in Paradise after ten days. This information causes great distress to the abbess who does not want to lose Eupraxia. Shortly after Eupraxia's death the abbess dies happily, knowing that she will be offered a place in Heaven through the intercession of her beloved Eupraxia.⁴

The author of the *Life* of Theodora of Thessalonike is a certain cleric called Gregory, who wrote not only Theodora's *Life* but also a text about the translation of the holy woman's relics two years after her death. He presents himself as the author of both texts towards the end of the *Translation*. As Gregory states, he felt obliged to write an account of the life and miracles of Theodora, since no such account had been written, in order to praise the saint who healed his sister Martha when she was seriously ill (*Translation*, ch.20). Gregory's account was delivered to a general congregation on the holy woman's feast day at the convent of Saint Stephen, where, as mentioned earlier, Theodora led her religious life (Kazhdan 1991; Patlagean 1984; Talbot 1996b: 159–162; Talbot 1996c).

The content of Theodora's *Life* is the following. She is born in Aegina but soon becomes an orphan after the death of her pious mother Chrysanthé. Her father, Antony, adopts the monastic habit immediately afterwards and the little Theodora is placed under the protection of her godmother who brings her up. At the early age of seven she is engaged to a man of a noble family. Theodora gives birth to three children. Two of them die in infancy and the third, Theopiste, is given to a nunnery in Thessalonike. After her husband's death Theodora too adopts the monastic habit and enters the nunnery where her daughter leads her monastic life. During her life in the convent Theodora manages through her abbess' disciplinary methods to surpass herself as a mother and to become an ideal nun distinguished for her obedience, hard work and humility.

⁴ For the content of the *Life* of Febronia, see Chapter 1 (pp. 26–27).

The following analysis consists of two parts. In the first part, "The Exemplary Body of the Abbess" the role of the abbess is investigated through the abbess' bodily performances, as manifested in the Lives of Melania and Irene of Chrysobalanton. In the second part, "The Obedient Body of the Nun", the corresponding bodily performances of the holy women undertaking the role of the nun are examined.

The Exemplary Body of the Abbess

THE ABBESS' DEEDS

Irene becomes greatly distressed when she is appointed abbess of the Chrysobalanton nunnery after the death of the previous abbess. Despite the fact that the undertaking of the abbess' role is against her will, Irene feels obliged to accept and become the convent's superior because she realises that this is a divine decision from which she cannot escape. Immediately after her first common meal with the nuns of the convent in her new status as their abbess, Irene goes to the cell which is reserved for the superior of the convent and, after closing its door, she immediately begins to pray in a flood of tears. In her prayer, she asks God to help her in her new mission. As soon as her prayer comes to an end, Irene says to herself:

Do you realise, humble Irene, what a burden Christ has laid on your shoulders? You have been entrusted with souls, and for the sake of souls God even became man and shed His blood. [...] Now, in the day of judgment everyone shall give account for an idle word. If this is so, can you be ignorant of the price for a soul that is lost, to be paid by him who has undertaken to care for her but fails to do all in his power to save her? You must by all means be utterly wakeful in your prayers and persevere in your fasting and bear the infirmities of the sisters, enduring all bravely and gently. Take heed to yourself lest one of your faults, although escaping yourself, become a cause of destruction for anyone of the sisters. (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 31, 33)

Ἄρα γε, ταπεινὴ Εἰρήνη, ἐπιγινώσκεις τὸ φορτίον ὃ περ σου Χριστὸς ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων ἐπέθετο; Ψυχὰς ἐνεπιστεύθης, ὑπὲρ ὧν Θεὸς καὶ ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο καὶ τὸ αἷμα ἐξέχεε [...] Οὐδ' ἐκεῖνο πάλιν ἀγνοεῖς, ὅτι, ἐὰν ὑπὲρ ἀργοῦ λόγου λόγον ἕκαστος δώσει ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως, ὑπὲρ ψυχῆς ἀπολλυμένης οἷα πείσεται ὁ τὴν φροντίδα ταύτης ἀναδεδεγμένος, εἰ μὴ τὰ παρ' ἑαυτοῦ ποιήσει πρὸς τὴν αὐτῆς σωτηρίαν. Ἐπαγρυπνεῖν σε δεῖ πάντως περισσοτέρως ἐν

εὐχαῖς, καρτερεῖν ἐν νηστείαις, τὰ ἀσθενήματα τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου βαστάζειν καὶ πάντα φέρειν γενναίως καὶ πράως. Πρόσεχε δὲ σεαυτῇ, μήποτε τὸ σὸν ἐλάττωμα τό σε λανθάνον ἀφορμὴ τινὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἀπωλείας γένηται. (*VlrChrys*, p.30.19–29, p.32.1)

Being enclosed and isolated in her cell, where none of the nuns can hear her, Irene expresses what she did not dare to say earlier to the nuns when they saw her distress and thought it was caused by her fear that they might not be obedient to her. At that point, she said nothing in reply when they asked her not to be worried about being the abbess:

The sisters begged her not to be so worried and distressed about being their abbess. "Look", they said, wholly ignorant of the sorrows she bore in her mind, "we are all ready for every kind of obedience towards you, and you will meet with no obstruction from us. No, with God's will our obedience will make all your ways easy." (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 29, 31)

αἱ ἀδελφαί, "Μὴ οὕτω λυπεῖσθαι" παρεκάλουν αὐτήν, "καὶ ἀδημονεῖν περὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας", λέγουσαι, "προστασίας· πᾶσαι γὰρ ἡμεῖς πρὸς πᾶσαν ὑπακοήν, ἰδοὺ, σοὶ ἐτοίμως ἔχομεν"—ἀγνοοῦσαι πάντως ἅπερ ἐκείνη κατὰ νοῦν ἐλογίζετο—, "καὶ οὐδὲν ἔσται πρόσκομμα παρ' ἡμῶν, ῥάδια πάντα τῆς ἡμετέρας ὑπακοῆς Θεοῦ διομαλιζούσης σοὶ ῥοπή." (*VlrChrys*, p.28.22–25, p.30.1–2)

Irene's words quoted above explain what the hagiographer means with his comment that the nuns were "wholly ignorant of the sorrows she [Irene] bore in her mind". In fact, Irene was not worried about the nuns, as they thought, but about herself and about her own responsibilities towards them. As Irene's self-confessional words reveal, she is not willing to undertake the role of the abbess because it is a difficult task from which great responsibilities emerge. Her previous role, that of the nun, was less complicated and less demanding. Her main tasks were to obey her abbess, perform ascetic practices and offer services to her fellow sisters. Then, even the issue of her own salvation was rather a responsibility of the former abbess than of herself. Now Irene, as the new abbess and effectively the spiritual leader of the convent, is responsible not only for her own salvation, since her spiritual mother has died, but also for the salvation of each of her nuns, which is an even more important and difficult task. Irene believes that her nuns' salvation, upon which in turn her own salvation relies, depends greatly on her own behaviour. It is crucial that she be especially careful so that she does not behave in a way that might prove spiritually harmful to the nuns.

In order to be able to perform successfully the role of the abbess, Irene has to acquire another self and a new identity which can be seen by both herself and her nuns. A first step towards the acquisition of her new identity as an abbess constitutes Irene's physical movement from a nun's cell to that of an abbess. This movement should be viewed not only as a cenobitic custom that Irene has to follow but also as an act which has a deeper significance. It signifies Irene's abandonment of the nun's role and her undertaking of the abbess' role. In other words, this movement in space symbolises Irene's movement from one identity to another.⁵ Irene's new cell used to be inhabited by the previous abbess, who was highly respected by the nuns and by Irene in particular. As her successor, Irene carries on her shoulders the weight of her pious life and of her abilities as the convent's superior. A comparison between the former abbess and Irene is unavoidable both on Irene's part and on that of the nuns. Irene expects from herself and is expected by her nuns not only to imitate the life of her spiritual mother but to surpass her in piety.

The main characteristics of Irene's new self are high spirituality, exemplarity and religious authority. This new self emerges from the relation which Irene establishes between herself and her nuns, as the following analysis will show, and from the stricter ascetic life in which she engages. Irene's ascetic practices as an abbess are described by the hagiographer in the following words:

Such were the words she spoke to herself, thereby arousing her soul and provoking it to a still harder training. The mode of life and conduct she had chosen was wholly angelic: she performed fasts of many days' duration and standing exercises lasting whole nights; she accomplished numberless genuflections; she slept on the floor, using the bed less as a source of rest than of discomfort. (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 33)

Ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν πρὸς ἑαυτὴν τοιαῦτα, οἷς δὴ καὶ θήξασα τὴν ψυχὴν ἐπὶ πολλῷ πλείονα διήγειρε τὴν ἀσκησιν, ἀγγελικὴν διόλου βίωσιν ἐλομένη καὶ πολιτείαν, νηστείας μὲν ἀνύουσα πολυημέρους, στάσεις παννύχους, γονάτων ὑπὲρ ἀριθμὸν τελοῦσα κλίσεις, χαμευνία ξηρὰ καὶ μὴ μᾶλλον ἀνέσεως ὅσον κακοπαθείας ἀφορμὴ κεχρημένη. (*VlrChrys* p.32.3–7)

⁵ Space is crucial in the construction of female religious identities. Each role of female sainthood is inextricably connected with the place where it is enacted. See in particular Chapter 5.

The severe ascetic practices in which Irene engages directly after she becomes the convent's abbess indicate that she understands her transformation from a nun into an abbess primarily as a bodily transformation. Of course, Irene also underwent a strict ascetic life as a nun but always under the control of the previous abbess. As soon as she becomes an abbess herself, Irene is free to engage in even stricter and more frequent ascetic practices. The ascetic performances described above by the hagiographer are repeated by Irene continuously as they become more and more difficult and spectacular. Her body as it is, being trained by her constant fasting and standing exercises, can gradually endure more severe ones. This causes the admiration and the astonishment of the convent's nuns and leads to the establishment of Irene's religious authority, since she is the only one in the nunnery who can perform such ascetic deeds. Irene's ascetic endurance, which surpasses that of her nuns, provides her with the spiritual superiority a good abbess should possess.

Irene's fasts, which become gradually more and more strict, allow her to reach a stage in which she can survive by eating and drinking almost nothing for forty days. Eventually she obtains a body that is "mere skin clinging to the bones" (*VlrChrys* p.76.5; tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 77). As for her standing exercises, at the beginning of her career as an abbess they last for a whole night or a whole day (this is the point she managed to reach when she performed this exercise while a nun). Later the standing exercises are extended to two or three days and in the end she can remain stretched with her hands directed to heaven for a whole week without having to lean on a wall or any other support (*VlrChrys* p.74.21–25). Thus, Irene manages to surpass even Saint Arsenios whose standing exercises she undertakes to imitate. Saint Arsenios used to stand with his hands stretched to the east for no longer than one evening (*VlrChrys* p.16.20–23). Irene's greater endurance shows that her devotion to God is even stronger than that of a holy man like Arsenios and that, in consequence, she is no less holy than he was. At some point, due to Irene's severe standing exercises, her body loses its natural flexibility with the result that she cannot bend her own arms and has to ask some nuns to do that for her (*VlrChrys* p.74.25–30).

Through the depiction of Irene's ascetic life, her hagiographer aims at presenting his heroine as an example of piety not only for her nuns but also for the Byzantine audience of the Life, which may also have

consisted of nuns, who in turn could identify with the fictional nuns. To achieve this aim, the author of the Life gives a theatrical character to the scenes where Irene's ascetic practices are depicted. Due to their theatricality, these scenes acquire a liveliness which makes them vividly present before the audience's eyes. This illusory visibility of Irene's pious life and steadfastness in God, created by the theatrical dimension of the narrative, results in the better perception and understanding of Irene's religious life and effectively its better imitation. An example of a theatrical episode concerning Irene's ascetic life is the following:

Once, when she had begun her exercise about sunset, raising her holy hands to heaven, as was her wont, a horde of demons suddenly appeared before her—it was about midnight—and tried with inarticulate shouts and agitated cries to shake her so as to prevent her immobile standing. One of them, being more evil as well as more insolent than the others, seemed to approach her and sneer at her, shouting such words as mimes use to utter. "Irene is made of wood", he said, "she is carried by wooden legs", and he spoke still other nonsense. Again he changed his tone and lamented, "How long will you oppress our race? How long will you lash us with your protracted prayers? How long will you burn us? How long shall we have to endure you? We have enough of the distress that you cause us." Then also the rest of them seemed to be afflicted and gave vent to loud lamentation, slapping their cheeks as if a great calamity had befallen them. But they made no progress towards the goal which they strived for, whereas Irene, as if caught up to heaven, had her whole mind there with God, standing wholly unshaken and undaunted. Then the demon stretched out his hand and kindled a stick against the lamp-wick. He dropped it around the neck of the holy woman, and it burnt up as if fanned, violently inflaming her whole hood along with the scapular and the shift, and began even to lick her flesh. It went over her, scorching her shoulders, her breast, her spine, her kidneys, and her flanks. [...] One of the sisters, who was awake for the nocturnal prayers, smelled the smoke from her flesh and left her cell in fear, thinking, "In what part of the convent can the fire be?" Tracking the scent she followed the odour to the cell of the abbess and stopped there. Looking in and seeing that it was filled with smoke and steam she only just managed to fling the door open and entered. She found—a terrible sight!—Irene all in flames but standing immobile and unwavering and unconquered, paying no heed whatever to the fire. As the sister, striving only to quench the flame and remove her teacher from the fire, began to agitate and shake her, extinguishing the fire and putting out the flame, at last she lowered her hands from their

extended position and remarked, "Why did you do this my child? Why did you deprive me of those great good things through your untimely kindness? We ought to savour not the things that be of men, but those that be of God. Behold, before my eyes there appeared an angel of God twining me a wreath of flowers that *eye hath not seen not ear heard* (1 Cor. 2.9), and he already kept his hand extended to put it on my head. But because of your concern he left me and went away with his wreath. Why, my child, did you render me an act of consideration worse than ingratitude? I hate a gift that causes me a loss." When the disciple heard this she began, tears falling from her eyes, with her fingers to pull away the Saint's clothes which, still, glowing, stuck to her flesh. And a strange fragrance was exhaled from them, incomparably more fragrant than any perfume and precious scents, which filled the whole convent. (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 45, 47, 49)

Καὶ δὴ ποτε περὶ δυσμὰς ἡλίου ταύτης ἀρξαμένης καὶ τὰς ὁσίας ἐπαράσης χεῖρας, ὡς ἔθος, εἰς οὐρανόν, περὶ που τὸ μεσονύκτιον φάλαγγ δαιμονίων ἀθρόον ἐπιστάσα φωναῖς ἀσήμοις τε καὶ τεταραγμένη βοῇ τὴν ἀκίνητον αὐτῆς διασαλεῦσαι στάσιν ἐπειρῶντο. Τούτων δὲ πονηρότερον ἔν οἷα καὶ αὐθαδέστερον πλησίον αὐτῆς γενόμενον ἐώκει ταύτην μυκτηρίζειν καὶ τὰ μίμων φθέγγεσθαι, Εἰρήνην ξυλίνην καὶ ξυλίνοις τοῖς ποσὶ βασταζομένην λέγον καὶ ἄλλ' ἅττα φλυαροῦν. Καὶ μεταβαλλόμενον αὐθις ὠδύρετο: "Ἔως πότε τὴν γενεὰν ἡμῶν", φάσκον "θλίβεις; Ἔως πότε ταῖς μακραῖς σου μαστίζεις ἡμᾶς προσευχαῖς; Ἔως πότε καίεις ἡμᾶς; Ἔως πότε σου ἀνεξόμεθα; Πλήρεις ἡμεῖς ἀνίας τῆς παρὰ σοῦ." Εἶτα σὺν ἐκείνῳ ἐδόκουν καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ κατατρύχεσθαι καὶ τὰς παρειὰς τύπτοντα θρήνον πολὺν ἐξηχεῖν ὡς ἐπὶ μεγάλη τούτοις τῇ συμφορᾷ. Ὡς δὲ μηδὲν ἦνουν πρὸς τὸ σπουδαζόμενον αὐτοῖς, ἐκείνη δὲ ὥσπερ ἀρπαγείσα εἰς οὐρανὸν ὅλην εἶχεν ἐκεῖ πρὸς Θεὸν τὴν διάνοιαν, ἀκλόνητος τὸ παράπαν καὶ ἀπτόητος ἵσταμένη, τὴν χεῖρα τὸ δαιμόνιον ἀπλῶσαν καὶ πυρσὸν ἀπὸ τῆς θρυαλλίδος ἐπιμύξαν καθῆκε περὶ τὸν τράχηλον τῆς ὁσίας. Ὁ δὲ καθάπερ τισὶ ῥιπίσιν ἀνάψας, ὅλον μὲν τὸ κουκούλιον σὺν τῷ ἐπωμίῳ καὶ τῷ χιτωνίσκῳ λάθρως κατακαίων ἤψατο καὶ τῶν σαρκῶν καὶ διεπορεύετο καταφλέγων τοὺς ὦμους, τὸ στήθος, τὴν ῥάχιν, τοὺς νεφροὺς, τοὺς λαγόνas. [...] Τίς τῶν ἀδελφῶν ταῖς νυκτεριναῖς εὐχαῖς ἐγρηγορούα καὶ τῆς κνίσσης τῶν σαρκῶν ὁσφραινομένη καὶ "Ποῦ ποτε τῆς μονῆς τὸ καίόμενόν ἐστιν" ἐξῆι θρονηθεῖσα τῆς κέλλης καὶ ῥινηλατοῦσα ἐπομένη τῇ δυσωδίᾳ μέχρι τοῦ τῆς προεσώσης ἔστησε τοὺς πόδας κελλίου. Παρακύψασα δὲ καὶ τοῦτο καπνοῦ καὶ κνίσσης πεπληρωμένον ἰδοῦσα, τῆς θύρας ἐκτροφὴν μόγις ποιησαμένη εἰσῆλθε μὲν, εὔρε δὲ—θέαμα φρικτόν—ὅλην μὲν τὴν Εἰρήνην ἐμπεπρησμένην, ἀκίνητον δὲ καὶ ἀρρεπὴ καὶ ἀήτητον ἐστηκυῖαν καὶ μηδαμῶς τῆς τοιαύτης ἐπιστρεφόμενης πυρκαϊᾶς. Ἐπεὶ δὲ πρὸς μόνον σπεύδουσα τὸ κατασβέσαι τὴν φλόγα, καὶ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐξελεσθαι τὴν διδάσκαλον ᾧ ῥατὰ τε κλονεῖν αὐτὴν καὶ συσσεῖν, σθενῦσα τὸ πῦρ καὶ

καταστέλλουσα τὴν φλόγα τὰς χεῖρας ὥς ποτε τῆς ἐκτάσεως ἐκείνη κατενεγκοῦσα, “Ἰνα τί τοῦτο πεποίηκας, τέκνον μου;” ἀπεκρίνατο, “τί με τοσούτων ἀπεσπέρησας τῇ εὐνοίᾳ σου ταύτῃ τῇ ἀκαίρῳ τῶν ἀγαθῶν; Οὐ δέον ἡμᾶς φρονεῖν τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ· ἰδοὺ γὰρ πρὸ τῶν ἐμῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἄγγελος ὡρᾶτο Θεοῦ πλέκων μοι στέφανον ἐξ ἀνθέων ὧν ὀφθαλμοὶ οὐκ εἶδε καὶ οὐς οὐκ ἤκουσε, καὶ ἤδη τὴν χεῖρα διατεινομένην εἶχε τῇ ἐμῇ τοῦτον ἐπιθεῖναι κεφαλῇ· σοῦ δὲ τῆς προμηθείας ἔνεκεν ἄπεισί με λιπῶν, ἔχων τὸν στέφανον μεθ’ ἑαυτοῦ. Τί οὖν μοι, τέκνον, ἀγνωμοσύνης χεῖρονα τὴν εὐγνωμοσύνην ἀπέδωκας; Μισῶ δωρεὰν προξενούσάν μοι ζημίαν.” Ὡς οὖν ταῦτα ἤκουσεν ἡ μαθήτρια, δάκρυα στάζουσα τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἤρξατο τὰ προσφύντα ταῖς σαρκὶ τῆς ὁσίας ῥακία ζέοντα ἔτι τοῖς δακτύλοις ἐκείθεν ἀνασπᾶν καὶ ἰδοὺ ξένη τις ἐκ τούτων ἀνεπέμπετο εὐωδία μύρου παντὸς καὶ ἄρωμάτων πολυτίμων ἀσυγκρίτως εὐωδεστέρα, ἥτις ὅλην ἐπλήρωσε τὴν μονήν. (*VlChrys* p.44.14–27, p.46.1–26, p.48.1–9)

This episode can be divided into three scenes. The first scene is set in Irene’s cell. There appears Irene’s figure which has the characteristics of a statue; the heroine is standing speechless and immobile having her arms stretched to heaven. Obviously what marks this setting is a lack of both movement and sound. This situation changes dramatically when a group of demons appear unexpectedly in Irene’s cell. The demons’ entrance to the scene is accompanied by loud sounds which attempt to destroy Irene’s peaceful contemplation. While the acoustic chaos created by the demons presents a striking contrast to Irene’s silence, the movements made by the demons are opposed to her immobility.

The demons’ movements and behaviour, which are described vividly and in detail, have a dramatic character. The most evil demon separates himself from the group and approaches Irene seeking to communicate with her. In order to achieve that, he has to imitate human language. Thus he transforms the inarticulate and incomprehensible sounds, that he has emitted so far, into understandable phrases and sentences. The vocabulary he employs is, according to the hagiographer, borrowed from that of the mimes. The presentation of the demon as an actor is in accordance with the way the Church Fathers viewed the performance put on by Satan to deceive human beings and divert pious persons from righteous ways.⁶

The demon calls Irene “wooden”,⁷ an adjective which in fact describes the substance of Irene’s new body and is in accordance with her portrayal as a statue.⁸ As has been stated above, Irene’s body is exercised to such a high degree that it loses its natural flexibility. Later in the narrative Irene is called “night-eater”, “wooden leg”, “insatiable stander”, “ironhearted” and “subduer of stones” by the devil who inhabits a man whom she cures (*VlChrys* p.70.19–22). These phrases are obviously addressed to Irene in a hostile and ironic manner, since they are coming from her enemy, the devil. They, however, express the truth about Irene’s new self, which the hagiographer does not fail to depict and praise. The demons try to tempt Irene by reminding her of the natural body she renounces and of the one she possesses while performing her standing exercises.

The most evil demon of the demons’ chorus, who goes near Irene, appears at the beginning to assume a powerful position. This very fact is also proved by the discourse he employs and the mocking tone of his voice. The demon’s presentation of himself as powerful, however, is just a pretence. In fact, he sees himself and his fellow demons being in a powerless position before Irene, as the sudden change of his mood and behaviour shows. Behaving as a talented actor, he immediately transforms his mocking tone into lamentation through which Irene’s power over the demons emerges. Her power, according to the demon, takes the form of violent acts such as whipping and burning. On seeing and hearing the demon’s words, the other demons also begin lamenting.

The demons’ theatrical behaviour, which aims at undermining Irene’s ascetic practices, has no effect on her since she remains motionless and concentrated on her communication with the divine. Not being able to convince Irene with words and theatrical behaviour to interrupt her standing exercise, the demons employ violence. The most evil demon

⁷ In the Life of Andrew the Fool, Andrew is described by the prostitutes as “wooden”, as a piece of stone for, despite their attempts, they do not manage to make him feel any sexual desire (*VAndr* p.34.311–312).

⁸ The holy person’s image as a statue is a common motif in monastic literature (Gorce 1962: 213–214, n. 2). In the Life of Melania, during one of Melania’s teachings addressed to her nuns referring to the steadfastness in faith, she mentions the *apophthegma* of a holy father. According to this *apophthegma*, one can be saved only if one behaves like a statue, namely if one, like Irene here, does not react against the insults and the beatings directed to him or her by the enemies of Christianity (*VMel* ch.44).

⁶ For John Chrysostom, for instance, see Leyerle 2001: 44–45.

sets fire to Irene's body and in this way he literally burns the heroine who "burns" the devil and his disciples with her steadfastness and ascetic life. His movements, which are described very vividly and in detail, make the dramatic character of the whole scene more prominent: first he stretches his hand, then he kindles a stick against the lamp-wick. Immediately afterwards he puts the burning stick to her neck, which takes fire at once. The fire goes down to her clothes and touches her flesh. It then starts burning her internal organs. At this point the first scene closes.

In the second scene, which is the shortest one, the protagonist's role is played by a nun of the convent whose name is not given by the hagiographer but whose actions, like those of the devils, are presented in detail. Following the example of her abbess, yet not in the same spectacular and uncommon way, the nun performs her nocturnal prayers. Unlike Irene, who does not interrupt her contemplation despite the incidents occurring in her cell and the fact that her body is about to burn, the nun breaks off her prayers in order to find the origin of the smell of burnt flesh that reaches her nose. Following the smell in the darkness, the nun ends up in Irene's cell where the third scene takes place. In this last scene, the nun becomes witness to a spectacle which is forbidden to her because it leads her to undertake actions that are against her superior's will. By entering Irene's cell and shaking her to extinguish the fire, the nun manages to do what the demons did not achieve earlier: to make Irene interrupt her standing exercise. Of course, the nun's initiative provokes Irene's angry reaction and this brings about her transformation from a statue into a living person. Now she moves and talks to the nun, blaming her for destroying her divine vision. While she was burning, she saw an angel who was twining a wreath of flowers which he was about to place on her head.

The demons' crying in the first scene is substituted by the nun's crying in the third scene, for causing her superior's anger and because she feels sorry for her behaviour. In both cases, however, crying is strongly associated with power and powerlessness. The characters who cry are the ones who find themselves in a powerless position before Irene. Both the demons and the nun attempt unsuccessfully to exercise a form of power over Irene, directed at her body. The demons appear to be able to burn Irene's body, whereas the nun is the one who saves it from being burnt.

Irene's "wooden" body constitutes the sign of her self-discipline and spiritual life of which the nuns should be constantly reminded so that they can lead their lives according to her example. However, Irene does not consider the example she offers to her nuns as the only means through which they can be disciplined and consequently led to salvation:

She said to herself, "If the Lord would grant me the gift of knowing by second sight those things which are done in secret by my sisters, I should try to set aright those who fall and stimulate those who are successful to run the race of virtue even more vigorously." (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 39)

Ἔλεγε γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῇ· "Εἴ μοι διορατικῶς εἰδέναι κύριος ἔδωκε τὰ κρυφῇ παρὰ τῶν ἐμῶν ἀδελφῶν γινόμενα, τὰς μὲν ἐπηνώρθουν ἂν σφαλλομένας, τὰς δὲ προκοπτούσας τρέχειν ἂν συνώθουν τὸν δρόμον τῆς ἀρετῆς εὐτονώτερον." (*VlrChrys* p.38.18–22)

As soon as Irene is granted the gift of knowing the acts of her nuns, she arranges a meeting with each of them after the morning prayers. This takes place in the following way:

Calling each of the sisters in to her, naming their names and having them sit down beside her, she gently made intimations about obscure and secret things. Skilfully hinting at their souls' emotions and thoughts and pricking their conscience, she provoked them to confess their transgressions and repent, and exacted promises of complete improvement of such faults. This made the sisters beside themselves in amazement. No longer did they merely pay heed to her as before but confessed and proclaimed that Irene was superior to human beings. (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 41)

καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὀνομαστὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἐκάστην καλοῦσα καὶ ταύτην παρακαθίζομένη ὁμαλῶς πως ὑπηνίττετο τὰ ἄδηλα καὶ κρύφια· καὶ τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς κινήματων αὐτῆς καὶ διανοημάτων εὐφυῶς καθήπτετο, νύττουσα τὸ συνειδὸς καὶ εἰς ὁμολογίαν τῶν σφαλμάτων καὶ μετάνοιαν ἐρεθίζουσα καὶ παντελοῦς λαμβάνουσα τῶν τοιούτων διορθώσεως ὑπόσχεσιν· ὅπερ ἐξίστασθαι ἑαυτῶν ἐποίει τὰς ἀδελφάς, καὶ οὐκέτι ταύτη προσεῖχον ὡς πρότερον, ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον εἶναι τὴν Εἰρήνην καὶ ὠμολόγουν καὶ ἀνεκέρυττον. (*VlrChrys* p.40.17–25)

Through her divine gaze, Irene can acquire knowledge about her nuns of which they themselves may not always be aware. She can know which of their acts and thoughts are right or wrong. Such knowledge allows her, on one hand, to improve them by correcting their wrongdoings, something they would not be able to do on their own, and on the other,

to motivate them to perform even better deeds by praising their good works.

As already stated, the abbess' main task in the convent is the teaching of Christian ethics through which the religious lives of her nuns can be directed and formed. The abbess' teaching project, which is founded on her body, takes two forms: a practical and a theoretical form, both of which take up a considerable space in the narrative, a fact that underscores their importance. The practical form, which is related to the abbess' actions and general behaviour, has been examined in this section through the example of Irene. It is to the theoretical part of the abbess' teaching project that we now turn.

THE ABBESS' WORDS

The theoretical form of the abbess' teaching refers to her didactic discourses addressed both to her nuns and to the visitors of her convent. In most cases, the hagiographers choose the narrative technique of *telling* in order to depict the abbesses' exemplary acts of bodily subjection through asceticism, whereas they employ the technique of *showing* for the abbesses' edifying acts of speaking.⁹ In telling, the omniscient narrator presents in his or her discourse the characters and their actions. In showing, the author silences the narrator's voice in order to give voice to the characters whose own discourse is quoted. In other words, as far as the technique of telling is concerned, the episodes of the narrative marked by the characters' behaviour and actions are presented from the narrator's point of view, while through the technique of showing, these episodes are depicted from the perspective of the characters. Thus, during most of the theoretical part of the abbess' teachings, it is her voice which speaks and not that of the narrator. In this case, the employment of the technique of showing, in which the narrator "shows" to his or her audiences the way by which the abbess preaches both to her nuns and to the laity, provides the texts with a vividness that has effects on the actual audiences of the Lives. In her sermons, the holy abbess speaks either in the first person plural, namely as "we", or in the second person plural, that is "you":

⁹ The narrative terms *telling* and *showing* were coined by Wayne Booth in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Gérard Genette (1980) equates *telling* and *showing* with the Platonic terms *diegesis* and *mimesis*.

Sisters, recall how the subjected stand before their mortal and worldly rulers with all fear and vigilance; so *we*, who stand before the fearsome and heavenly King, should perform our liturgy with much fear and trembling. (tr. Clark 1984: 56; emphasis added)

Κατανοήσατε, ἀδελφαί, πῶς τοῖς φθαρτοῖς καὶ ἐπιγείοις ἄρχουσιν μετὰ παντὸς φόβου καὶ νήψεως παρίστανται οἱ ὑποτεταγμένοι· ἡμεῖς δὲ τῷ φοβερῷ καὶ ἐπουρανίῳ βασιλεῖ παριστάμεναι, μετὰ πόσου φόβου καὶ τρόμου ὀφείλομεν ἐκτελεῖν ἑαυτῶν τὴν λειτουργίαν. (VMel ch.42; emphasis added)

The fact that the abbess' words are addressed to "us" and "you" creates the illusion that they are not only directed to the texts' internal audiences, the nuns and the laity, but also to the texts' external audiences which possibly also consisted of nuns and laypeople. According to the hagiographers, the heroines' sermons always have a large impact on their listeners who are inspired by divine zeal and who then transform the holy women's words into practice. In Melania's Life, after quoting Melania's sermon on chastity addressed to laypeople, the hagiographer states: "Many who heard these things were zealous for purity and leaped into the arena of virtue" (tr. Clark 1984: 47; Ταῦτα δὲ πολλοὶ ἀκούοντες ἐζήλωσαν τὴν ἀγνείαν καὶ τοῖς σκάμμασιν τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐπεπήδησαν. VMel ch.29).

Melania's *didaskalia* to her nuns has a similar influence. Referring to Melania's words on the nuns' participation in nocturnal liturgy, the hagiographer points out:

By thus saying these things, she affirmed the sisters' zeal through her teaching, so that when the blessed woman wished to spare them in their vigil, because of the great toil which they had had ..., they would not agree. (tr. Clark 1984: 60)

Καὶ ταῦτα λέγουσα οὕτως αὐτῶν τὴν προθυμίαν ἐπερρώννυνεν τῇ καλῇ διδασκαλίᾳ, ὥστε, εἰ καὶ ποτε ἠθούλετο ἡ μακαρία φείσασθαι αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ἀγρυπνίᾳ διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὰς ἀπὸ πολλοῦ κόπου ..., αὐταὶ οὐ συνεχώρουν. (VMel ch.48)

Taking into account the edifying function of saints' Lives in Byzantine society, one cannot avoid seeing the effect which the abbess' *didaskalia* appears to have on the text's internal listeners as a metaphor for the effect that the hagiographer aims at having on his or her own audiences by employing the technique of showing. Since the Lives of saints used to be read out loud, the external listeners of the texts could

identify with the internal listeners of the abbesses' discourses.

The success of the abbess' sermons can be attributed to two important factors: the accordance of her words with her life and the highly rhetorical character of her speeches. The abbess' words find their first application in her own deeds. Her act of telling is at the same time a gesture of showing. She talks about fasting, vigils, prayers and virtues, while she herself is the living example of all these. Her speaking body, which stands before the nuns, reveals through its appearance her ascetic life (it is skinny and tired) and her lack of vanity (her garments are of hair-cloth [Melania] or she possesses only the one garment she wears [Irene]). Thus the abbess' language does not constitute just an instrument of representation but it places the addressees under the obligation to respond to her words with actions. As stressed by Irene in one of her teachings, words without actions are meaningless:

Endure the words I speak in my humility: they are brought to you in love. For unless we lead this ascetic life, to which we have submitted ourselves voluntarily, in accordance with the laws laid down for it, we shall have no profit even from faith itself. Yes, faith without works is dead. (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 33)

ἀνέχεσθαι τῶν ῥημάτων τῆς ἐμῆς ταπεινώσεως δι' ἀγάπην ὑμῖν προσφερομένων· καὶ γὰρ ἂν τὸν βίον τοῦτον τὸν ἀσκητικόν, ὃν ὑπῆλθομεν ἐκουσίως, μὴ κατὰ τοὺς αὐτῷ κειμένους μετέλθωμεν νόμους, οὐδὲ ἡμῖν ὄφελος οὐδ' αὐτῆς τῆς πίστεως. Χωρὶς γὰρ ἔργων ἡ πίστις νεκρά. (*VlChrys* p.32.19–23)

The abbess' edifying discourses are also influential and persuasive as linguistic products. The abbess appears to be rhetorically competent and can manipulate language in ways that give rise to powerful effects. The following extract from one of Irene's sermons addressed to her nuns is a good specimen of an abbess' rhetorical talents:

We have heard of a Kingdom of Heaven, an eternal and endless life, and an enjoyment of undefiled and everlasting good things. We have come to believe in Jesus our God and Lord who brought these good news and gave these promises: in Him we do believe. [...] The Lord said, "*No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other*" (Mt. 6.24; Lk. 16.13). Being one, the soul cannot be divided into two, nor can the same soul simultaneously enjoy herself and restrain herself, both live in poverty and be rich, both seek the Lord's humility and win the futile glory of men. We, then,

have forsaken all and followed Him. To follow Him will be of no avail to us if we do so merely corporeally, but only if our soul and our whole inner being follow Him too. Yes, we must dispel all desire and attachment to this life from our souls, lest we, outwardly appearing to have fled this world, be inwardly in the very middle of the world. [...] Let it be our work and our hard struggle to acquire such virtues as will save us, namely, purity and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12.14) but shall hear, "Away with the ungodly one lest he behold the majesty of the Lord!" (Is. 26.11). Humility, for whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, as the Lord said, and that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Lk. 14.11). [...] purity is above nature, above nature is also freedom from passion. But when He came who is above nature, being both God and man, He gave these things above nature to those who believe in Him. They are given, however, only to those who pray for them, and even to them not when in doubt of the heart; for a double minded man is unstable in all his ways. (Iac. 1.8; tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 33, 35, 37)

Ἠκούσαμεν γὰρ βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν,
ζῶην αἰδίου καὶ ἀτελεύτητον,
τρυφὴν ἀκηράτων αἰώνιων ἀγαθῶν·

ἐπιστεύσαμεν τῷ εὐαγγελισμένῳ
καὶ ὑποσχομένῳ Ἰησοῦ
τῷ Θεῷ καὶ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν,
εἰς ὃν καὶ πεπιστεύκαμεν.

[...]

Εἶπε γὰρ ὁ κύριος·
"Οὐδεὶς δύναται δυσὶ κυρίοις δουλεῖν·
ἢ γὰρ τὸν ἓνα μισήσει καὶ τὸν ἕτερον ἀγαπήσει
ἢ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθέξεται καὶ τοῦ ἐτέρου καταφρονήσει."

Μία γὰρ οὖσα ἡ ψυχὴ εἰς δύο μερισθῆναι οὐ δύναται·
οὐ δύναται ἡ αὐτὴ ἐν ταύτῃ καὶ τρυφᾶν καὶ ἐγκρατεῦσθαι,
καὶ πτωχείαν χρημάτων ἔχειν καὶ πλουτεῖν ἐν χρήμασι,
καὶ ταπεινῶσιν τοῦ κυρίου μετιέναι
καὶ τὴν κενὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων θερίζειν δόξαν.

Ἡμεῖς οὖν ἀφήκαμεν πάντα καὶ ἠκολουθήσαμεν αὐτῷ.
Ἐὰν μὴ καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ ἡμῶν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐντὸς ἡμῶν ἀκολουθῇ,
οὐδὲν ἡμῖν ὄφελος ἡ σωματικὴ μόνον ἀκολουθήσις·
ἀλλὰ δεόν ἡμᾶς πᾶσαν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς διῶξαι
βιωτικὴν ἐπιθυμίαν καὶ προσπάθειαν,

ἵνα μὴ τὰ ἔξω φαινόμενα τὸν κόσμον φυγοῦσαι
τὰ ἔνδον μέσον ὤμεν τοῦ κόσμου.

[...]

Τὸ δὲ ἔργον ἡμῶν καὶ τὸ ἀγώνισμα τὸ μέγα ἐκεῖνο ἂν εἴη,
τὸ τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐκεῖνας κτήσασθαι, αἱ σφύζουσιν ἡμᾶς·
τὴν ἀγνεῖαν τε καὶ τὸν ἀγιασμόν,
οὐ χωρὶς οὐδεὶς ὄψεται τὸν κύριον

ἀλλ' ἀκούσει

“Ἀρθήτω ὁ ἀσεβής, ἵνα μὴ ἴδῃ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου,”

τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην, ὅτι

“Πᾶς ὁ ὑψὼν ἑαυτὸν ταπεινωθήσεται,”

εἶπεν ὁ κύριος,

“ὁ δὲ ταπεινὼν ἑαυτὸν ὑψωθήσεται.”

[...]

Ὑπὲρ φύσιν γὰρ ἡ ἀγνεῖα,

ὑπὲρ φύσιν καὶ τὸ ἀόρητον.

Ἀφ' οὗ δὲ ὁ ὑπὲρ φύσιν παρεγένετο,

Θεὸς ὢν καὶ ἄνθρωπος,

καὶ τὰ ὑπὲρ φύσιν ταῦτα

τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς αὐτὸν ἐδωρήσατο·

δωρεῖται δὲ τοῖς αἰτοῦσι μόνοις,

καὶ τοῦτοις μὴ ἐν δισταγμῷ καρδίας·

“Ἀνὴρ γὰρ δίψυχος ἀκατάστατος ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ.”

(*VlrChrys* p.32.24–27, p.34.3–14 and 23–30, p.36.10–15)¹⁰

Irene's sermon is characterised by its prominent biblical style that becomes obvious from the very first sentence opening with a verb in the first person plural: ἡκούσαμεν. The biblical tone of the sermon is not only to be recognised in the repetitive use of verbs in the first person plural but also in the biblical citations employed by Irene which are so successfully incorporated in her speech that they become inseparable parts of it.

Irene mentions only one of her sources, namely Christ in the Gospels. She quotes some of the aphorisms he employed during his teachings. After each quotation of Christ's words, Irene's own discourse imitates

the style of Christ's speech. Such an example is the following:

No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. (Mt. 6.24; Lk. 16.13) Being one, the soul cannot be divided into two, nor can the same soul simultaneously enjoy herself and restrain herself, both live in poverty and be rich. (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 35)

“Οὐδεὶς δύναται δυσὶ κυρίοις δουλεύειν·

ἢ γὰρ τὸν ἓνα μισήσῃ καὶ τὸν ἕτερον ἀγαπήσῃ

ἢ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθέξῃ καὶ τοῦ ἑτέρου καταφρονήσῃ.”

Μία γὰρ οὕσα ἡ ψυχὴ εἰς δύο μερισθῆναι οὐ δύναται·

οὐ δύναται ἡ αὐτὴ ἐν ταύτῳ καὶ τρυφᾶν καὶ ἐγκρατεῦσθαι,

καὶ πτωχεῖαν χρημάτων ἔχειν καὶ πλουτεῖν ἐν χρήμασι.

(*VlrChrys* p.34.4–8; emphasis added)

Here Irene follows the paratactic structure adopted in the speech that is supposed to belong to Christ. Like Christ's speech, her own is based on binary oppositions. She also repeats words from Christ's text. The biblical style of Irene's sermon achieves a double effect. On one hand it provides the sermon with religious authority which establishes Irene's role as a preacher. On the other hand it makes her sermon acoustically pleasant and therefore easier to learn and to apply. Irene's sermon contains an abundance of rhetorical devices, such as aphorisms, pleonasms, repetition of the same words which create a rhyme, metaphors, images, symbols and stylistic symmetry which is formed by binary oppositions.

In the Life of an abbess, the techniques the abbess employs for spiritual instruction are mainly directed towards a number of anonymous nuns whose existence and actions acquire importance in the narrative as long as they highlight the abbess' exemplarity and allow her to attain higher levels of spirituality.¹¹ The nuns' anonymity, and the lack of any episodes or subplots referring to their bodily subjections and spiritual achievements mark their unimportance as individuals in relation to the holy abbess. Thus, in the Life of an abbess, even though her disciplinary project is addressed to her nuns, it serves in fact her desire to become a

¹¹ There are some cases in which a nun's name is given, but these cases are not related to the abbess' disciplinary project. Such an instance is when the abbess lying on her deathbed names the nun who will succeed her.

¹⁰ I print the Greek text in such a way as to make its poetic elements more obvious.

saint: she is sanctified because she is exemplary. She is the one who is singled out through her disciplinary strategies, and not her nuns, since the locus where these strategies are performed is her own body, which shows and tells. In other words, in an abbess' Life the emphasis is placed on the one part of the disciplinary project that is the teacher and not on the second part which consists of the disciples.

In their attempt to present the abbesses as heroines belonging to a divine rather than to a human world, the hagiographers provide them with godly attributes. The abbesses' approach towards their people, namely the nuns, resembles God's treatment of his people. Like God, the abbesses see their nuns from a distance and in secret and they develop no personal and close relationships with any of them. The lack of any personal relationships between the abbess and some of her nuns of course reinforces the abbess' individuality and spiritual distance which mark her protagonist's role in the narrative and in the end effect her sanctity. The situation changes in the Life of a nun.

The Obedient Body of the Nun

THE NUN UNDER THE ABBESS' CONTROL

In the Life of a nun the abbess' disciplinary strategies appear to be directed not to a number of nuns, but to a particular nun, on the body of whom these strategies are manifested thus making this nun the central heroine of the narrative. For a large part of the protagonist nun's cenobitic career, the abbess appears to manipulate, to train, to punish the nun's body, to make it obey, respond and become pious. In the nun's Life, the abbess' *didaskalia* loses the public character it has in the Life of an abbess and takes a private form. The abbess appears to build up with her didactic discourse only the protagonist nun, and her divine gaze focuses mainly on this specific nun whose actions and behaviour it carefully examines and corrects. In contrast to the Life of the abbess, in a nun's Life the disciplinary practices exercised by the abbess seek to improve and lead to holiness only the protagonist nun.

In the Life of a nun, the form which the abbess' approach towards her nuns takes constitutes a combination of two different types of behaviour: she behaves both like the Christian God, as she does when she is the central heroine of a Life, and like a mother. She appears to be the distant, religious authority before all the nuns except for the central hero-

ine, with whom she creates a mother-daughter relationship through the disciplinary strategies she applies to her. The image of the abbess as both God and mother is in accordance with God's image in the Old Testament where God is sometimes presented having motherly behaviour towards his chosen people, the Israelites (Bynum-Walker 1982: 125).¹²

Like God who in the Old Testament "chooses" his people, the abbess "chooses" the central heroine, who is distinguished among the other nuns for her beauty, divine zeal and obedience, and devotes her life rather to this nun's salvation than to her own. By doing this, the abbess behaves not much differently from a mother who is prepared to undergo self-sacrifice in order to protect her children whom she loves more than herself. An abbess also shares an agony similar to that of a mother, which is manifested in a continuous struggle to bring up her children rightly so that they prove successful in their social roles when they grow up. The abbess struggles to provide her favourite nun with the conditions and means needed in order to offer her a place in the society of saints.

The nun, on the other hand, like an infant that is incapable of satisfying its own needs and consequently depends absolutely on its mother's care, relies for a long time on the abbess' advice and instructions. Through her abbess' help, the nun attempts to construct her spiritual self. Eventually the nun becomes spiritually independent. This occurs when the nun identifies with the abbess and becomes her double, as it will be shown later.

In two Lives out of the five in which the role of the nun is depicted, the chosen nun is a blood relative of the abbess, a fact that reinforces the abbess' motherly feelings towards her. Febronia, the first example, is the daughter of the abbess Bryene's brother. Bryene takes Febronia under her protection from the early age of two and brings her up, replacing her physical mother. The second example is Theodora of Thessalonike. The abbess of the convent of Saint Stephen, Anna, is her relative and for this reason she treats Theodora, who lost her natural mother in infancy, as her own child. She says to Theodora when the latter asks her to include her in the group of her nuns:

¹² Cf. Is. 49.15:

"The Lord has forsaken me; my God has forgotten me."

Can a woman forget the infant at her breast,

or a loving mother the child of her womb?

Even these forget, yet I will not forget you.

Since you are my blood [relative] and my child and I am well aware of the mode of life [you have led] since you were in swaddling clothes, how should I not welcome you and embrace you as if you were one of my limbs? (tr. Talbot 1996b: 181–182)

Αἶμα ἐμόν σε καὶ τέκνον ὑπάρχουσαν καὶ τὴν ἐκ σπαργάνων σου εἰδυῖα διαγωγὴν, πῶς οὐ προσδέξομαι καὶ ὥς οἰκεῖον καταφιλήσω μέλος; (*VTheodThess* ch.21.2–4)

Theodora returns Anna's motherly feelings towards her by appearing to be a real daughter to her: she takes responsibility for her when Anna reaches very old age and needs to be looked after. Theodora's portrayal as the good daughter who takes care of her old parents is accentuated by the hagiographer's statement that Theodora was:

Mindful to the One Who says, "*Child, help thy father in his old age, and grieve him not as long as he liveth. And if his understanding fails, have patience with him, and despise him not when thou art in thy full strength. For compassion for a father will not be forgotten.*" (Sir. 3.12–14; tr. Talbot 1996b: 196)

μεμνημένη τοῦ λέγοντος: "τέκνον, ἀντιλαβοῦ ἐν γήρᾳ πατρός σου, καὶ μὴ λυπήσῃς αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ ζωῇ σου· καὶ ἂν ἀπολίπη σύνεσιν, συγγνώμην ἔχε, καὶ μὴ ἀτιμάσῃς αὐτὸν ἐν πάσῃ ἰσχύϊ σου. Ἐλεημοσύνη γὰρ πατρὸς οὐκ ἐπιλησθήσεται." (*VTheodThess* ch.37.27–31)

The main difference between a mother and the abbesses appearing in the Lives of nuns lies in the fact that a mother has in mind the welfare of her children, whereas abbesses seek to lead their chosen nuns to a total indifference of worldly things so that they might achieve holiness. An abbess' motherly affection towards her favourite nun is translated into an ascetic training which is harder than the one imposed on the other nuns. Bryene, for instance, orders Febronia to eat only once every second day, whereas all the other nuns are allowed to eat every day. This different treatment of Febronia by the abbess serves as a motivation for Febronia to restrict herself to an even stricter regime and she refrains from bread and water. In addition, unlike the other nuns, Febronia sleeps on a narrow stool and sometimes she makes her sleep even more uneasily by sleeping on the ground (*PFeb* ch.5).

With the consent and even the encouragement of the abbess, the chosen nun's ascetic life appears to violate the convent's rules, according to which all nuns should be treated in the same way and should follow

the same ascetic practices. Theodora of Thessalonike knows that she breaks the convent's rules by fasting more than the nuns who had entered the convent before her. For this reason she keeps her fasting secret. However, when the abbess realises this she not only approves it but also encourages Theodora to fast openly:

Desiring to increase [her exercise of] this virtue even more in the convent, and not being bold enough to ask the superior [for permission] to fast more than the nuns who had come there before her, nor daring to break the monastic rule, lest she thereby give offence to the nuns, she used to sit in the refectory with the nuns, but hardly touched food. And often she did not drink water for an entire week. But she did not do this for long without the knowledge of her superior. For she [Anna] bade her to practice openly, as best she could, this [fasting] and whatever else was profitable to her, because she loved Theodora. (tr. Talbot 1996b: 183)

Διὰ τοι καὶ ἐν τῷ κοινοβίῳ ἐπιθυμοῦσα ταύτην καὶ μᾶλλον αὖξιν, καὶ μὴ θαρροῦσα τὴν προεστῶσαν ἐξαιτήσασθαι τοῦ περισσοτέρως τῶν πρὸ αὐτῆς ἐκέισε τεταγμένων ἀδελφῶν ἐγκρατεῦσθαι, μήτε τολμῶσα τὸν τῆς μονῆς καταλῦσαι κανόνα, ἵνα μὴ σκάνδαλον ταῖς ἀδελφαῖς ἐκ τούτου προσάψειεν, ἐκάθητο μὲν μετὰ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐν τῇ τραπέζῃ, ἔμενεν δὲ παρὰ μικρὸν νῆστις· καὶ πολλάκις πᾶσαν τὴν ἑβδομάδα οὐδὲ ὕδατος ἐγεύετο. Ἄλλ' οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ τῆς προεστῶσης μέχρι πολλοῦ τοῦτο διετελεῖτο. Ἐνετείλατο γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο καὶ πᾶν ὃ λυσιτελὲς εἶη αὐτῇ φανερώς ποιεῖν ὅση δύναμις, ὅτι ἡγάπα τὴν Θεοδώραν. (*VTheodThess* ch.22.12–22)

The fact that there is a nun in the convent who has different ascetic rights from the other nuns and is provided with more spiritual affection, at times provokes the envy of some of the other nuns and disturbs the relations between them and the protagonist nun or the abbess. In Febronia's Passion, the nuns of the convent turn against Bryene, who because of Febronia's illness is not prepared to let them leave the nunnery so that they can avoid being arrested by the pagan soldiers (*PFeb* ch.10).

In Eupraxia's Life, Germana, a fellow nun of Eupraxia motivated by envy tries to tempt Eupraxia. She presents Eupraxia's strict and different ascetic life as false and claims that Eupraxia undergoes harsh asceticism in order to distinguish herself from the other nuns because she wants to be chosen as the future abbess of the convent (*VEupr* ch.20). Germana's thought that Eupraxia's ascetic performances would allow her to become an abbess reflects a reality that is strongly supported by the Lives of nuns. As we will see later, the abbess views the protagon-

nist nun's salvation as a personal matter because she intends to make her her successor.

The difference between a physical mother and an abbess behaving like a mother is graphically illustrated in Theodora's Life, where Theodora leads her cenobitic life in the same convent as her daughter Theopiste. Being tempted by the devil, Theodora begins worrying about Theopiste's welfare. She says to the abbess:

My Lady Mother, you who alone are concerned with my soul, I cannot endure to see the daughter born of my womb clothed in a cheap and tattered garment and subsisting on so little food. Please arrange for her to be transferred to another convent, since I cannot bear the fire in my heart. For I am a mother, and like all [mothers], I am too devoted to my child. (tr. Talbot 1996b: 185–186)

Κυρία μήτερ, σοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς μόνης ποιούσης τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν, οὐ φέρω τὴν ἐκ τῶν ἐμῶν σπλάγχχνων τεχθεῖσαν καθορᾶν εὐτελεῖ καὶ διερρηγμένῳ ῥακίῳ περικαλυπτομένην καὶ βραχυτάτῃ διαιτωμένην τροφῇ. Κέλευσον οὖν αὐτὴν ἐτέρῳ μοναστηρίῳ δοθῆναι, ἐπεὶ οὐ φέρω τὴν τῶν σπλάγχχνων μου πύρωσιν· μήτηρ γάρ εἰμι, καὶ ὡς πᾶσαι καὶ γὼ περὶ τὸ τέκνον διάκειμαι. (*VTheodThess* ch.25.14–20)

Here Theodora, being influenced by her motherly instincts—she is a mother who suffers by seeing her daughter's body suffering—misunderstands the abbess' role as a mother. She seems to expect that the abbess would behave towards her in the way a natural mother like herself does, one who would do everything to avoid her child's bodily sufferings. Thus she asks the abbess to send Theopiste away so that she can be released from her own sufferings as a mother. The abbess replies to Theodora's request by engaging in a long private edifying speech in which she presents Theodora's motherly behaviour as worldly and as such that contradicts the angelic habit of the nun which she has decided to adopt. She finally threatens Theodora with punishment if she goes on treating Theopiste as her daughter.

After this incident, Anna, as a genuine spiritual mother and relative of Theodora, who is highly concerned about her salvation, seeks to find a way to free Theodora from her emotional attachment to her daughter (*VTheodThess* ch.27.2–7). She therefore examines Theodora's behaviour more intensively in order to find an instance in which Theodora shows motherly affection towards her daughter. When such an in-

stance occurs, Anna orders the two women not to talk to each other any longer (*VTheodThess* ch.27.36–39). Through this punishment both women are disciplined, especially Theodora who is not interested in her daughter's welfare any more but only in her spiritual improvement.

The protagonist nun's spiritual dependence on the mother-abbess, and the complete control of the latter over the nun, are manifested mainly in two disciplinary methods employed by the abbess: punishment and confession. The abbess utilises punishment when her favourite nun fails to follow her instructions, as the example of Theodora demonstrates. In fact, Theodora of Thessalonike, being punished twice during her cenobitic career, is the only protagonist nun who undergoes punishment.

Punishment as an instrument of discipline is also directed at holy women enacting other roles of sainthood, such as the martyr (Chapter 1) and the pious wife (Chapter 5). The difference between the punishment of a nun and those of a martyr and a pious wife is that in the first instance the punishment has a positive connotation, whereas in the second it acquires a negative meaning. Both the martyr and the pious wife are punished by violent and hostile male authorities in order that they either renounce their faith (martyr) or give up their God-pleasing activities (pious wife). The nun, however, is punished out of motherly love in order to become spiritually better.

Theodora's second offence is the following: on a cold winter's night, without informing her abbess, Theodora removes her rush mat from its usual place because the place gets wet. The abbess sees this movement of Theodora as a form of selfishness. Aiming at striking at the root of Theodora's offence based on selfishness and at offering an example of obedience and humility to the other nuns, the abbess imposes on Theodora a punishment both humiliating and painful. She orders Theodora to spend the night outside in the severe cold. Theodora's punishment, witnessed by the nuns and seen by the angels, is quite spectacular:

She went out to the assigned spot, paying no heed to the extremely bitter weather and the torrential downpour of rain at that time and icy cold and violent blasts of wind. Thus from evening on she spent the night outdoors, sitting on both feet. For she was unable to sit down all the way because of the rainwater flowing beneath her. O, what a marvel! The angels were astonished to see such a terrible sight, a woman, the soft and *weakest vessel* (1 Pet. 3.7), thus spending the night in the open air, being assailed by constant pelting of rain and frozen by the cold because of the order of the moth-

er superior. [...] Around midnight when the rain stopped and the bitter air became even colder because a lot of snow had fallen, the raindrops froze and stuck to the tattered garment that covered her head and shoulders. (tr. Talbot 1996b: 192)

εἰς τὸν ὀρισθέντα τόπον ἐξήει τῆς δριμυτάτης ὥρας καταφρονήσασα καὶ τοῦ ραγδαίως τότε καταφερομένου ὑετοῦ καὶ τῆς κρυμώδους ἐκείνης καὶ διαίας τῶν ἀνέμων πνοῆς. Τοιγαροῦν ἂφ' ἐσπέρας ἐπ' ἀμφοτέροις καθεσθεῖσα ποσί, διενυκτέρευε αἶθριος. Οὐδὲ γὰρ τέλεον καθεσθῆναι ἡδύνατο διὰ τὸ ἐκ τοῦ ὑετοῦ κάτωθεν ὑπορρέον ὕδωρ. Ὡ τοῦ θαύματος· ἐξέστησαν ἄγγελοι τοῦτο τὸ φρικτὸν ὄραμα βλέποντες, γυναῖκα, τὸ ἀσθενέστατον καὶ μαλακὸν σκεῦος, οὕτως αἶθριον διανυκτερεύουσιν, πυκνοῖς βόλοις βαλλομένην τοῦ ὄμβρου καὶ πηγνυμένην τῷ κρίει διὰ τὴν τῆς μητρὸς ἐντολήν. [...] Περί δὲ τὸ μεσονύκτιον τῆς τοῦ ἀέρος πικρίας διὰ τὸ καὶ χιόνα καταβληθῆναι πολλήν, αἱ τοῦ ὄμβρου σταγόνες κατὰ τοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς καὶ τῶν ὤμων κειμένου ῥάκους κρυσταλλωθεῖσαι ἐκρέμαντο. (*VTheodThess* ch.33.8–17 and 19–22)

The situation of Theodora's body as described in the above passage produces the truth of her sin. She attempted to protect her body by avoiding getting wet through sleeping on a wet floor: now, not only is water all around her, but she is also exposed to extremely bad weather conditions. Theodora's long stay outside in the cold results in her head and shoulders being turned into an icy bust.

As for confession, in the monastic contexts depicted in the examined texts, it sometimes appears to be a painful experience which the protagonist nun tries to avoid. Eupraxia, for instance, does not inform her abbess about her first temptations because she is ashamed of talking about them (*VEupr* ch.14). Part of the nun's monastic training is also to learn to confess. Anna, the abbess of Theodora of Thessalonike, "exhorts her night and day to confess her deeds and her thoughts, her words and her movements, and not to do anything without her approval" (tr. Talbot 1996b: 183; καὶ παρήνει νύκτωρ τε καὶ μεθ' ἡμέραν τὰς πράξεις καὶ ἐνθυμήσεις, τὰ ῥήματα καὶ τὰς κινήσεις ἐξαγορεύειν καὶ μηδὲν ἄνευ τῆς γνώμης αὐτῆς δρᾶν. *VTheodThess* ch.22.26–28). The act of confession becomes easier for the nun as she realises that nothing escapes the divine gaze of her abbess.

Confession appears as a necessity for the nun. By verbalising her temptations and the thoughts that preoccupy her mind, she can see what occurs inside her and learn about herself. The abbess, who is there to listen, gives advice deriving from her own experience about how

to overcome temptations. The ways suggested by the abbess for defeating temptations are related to stricter ascetic practices or labour through which the heroine is humiliated and her body suffers. Eupraxia, for example, is once asked to abstain from eating for one more day and thus she ends up eating only two days a week (*VEupr* ch.15). At some other point, when Eupraxia is again tempted and she confesses to the abbess, her abbess orders her to remove some heavy stones from their original place next to the convent's oven, and from the oven back to their place, and repeat this task for thirty days while she is seen and mocked by the other nuns (*VEupr* chs.16–17).

In contrast to the nun, the abbess does not need confession, since she possesses such high levels of spirituality, as the example of Irene as abbess that was discussed earlier, indicates. While she is a nun, however, Irene cannot defeat her temptations without confession:

But with her pure spiritual eye she [Irene] perceived this to be part of the Evil One's plot and immediately revealed all these thoughts to her guide and abbess. Finding relief from the attack through her confession, she persevered in her struggle as before. (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 21)

Ἡ δὲ τῷ κεκαθαρμένῳ τῆς διανοίας ὀμματι τῆς ἐπιβουλῆς εἶναι ταῦτα τοῦ πονηροῦ μὴ ἀγνοήσασα, παραυτίκα πάντας τοὺς τοιοῦτους διαλογισμοὺς ἀνακαλύπτει τῇ ὁδηγῷ καὶ καθηγουμένῃ, καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐξαγορεύσεως ἀπαλλαγὴν εὐρούσα τῆς ἐπηρείας τῶν προτέρων ὁμοίως ἀγώνων εἶχετο. (*VIrChrys* p.20.2–6)

After having been trained for a long time under the close supervision of her abbess, the nun "grows up" spiritually and reaches a stage at which she does not need her abbess' disciplinary methods. In other words, she ceases to be the "infant" for which life is impossible without a mother's care and she becomes capable of taking care both of herself and others. It is to this new stage of the nun's life that we now turn.

THE NUN AS THE ABBESS' DOUBLE

That in the texts devoted to the nun's role the abbess takes many pains to create the ideal nun so that the latter proves to be the abbess' own plant is very graphically expressed in Febronia's Passion:

Febronia said, "I have faith in God, mother; just as in the past I have never transgressed your commandments, so now I will not do so or be neglectful of your admonitions. Rather, let the peoples see and be astounded, let

them congratulate the aged Bryene and say, truly this is a plant belonging to Bryene." (tr. Brock and Ashbrook-Harvey 1987: 163)

Φεβρωνία λέγει· "πιστεύω εἰς τὸν Θεὸν μητέρα μου ὅτι ὡς οὐδέποτε παρῆλθόν σου ἐντολήν οὐδὲ νῦν παρέλθω τὴν ἐντολήν σου καὶ τὴν παραίνεσιν· ἀλλ' ὄφονται πολλοὶ καὶ ἐκστήσονται καὶ μακαριοῦσι τὸ γῆρας Βρυένης καὶ εἰπωσιν· ἀληθῶς αὕτη ἡ φυτεία Βρυένης ἐστίν". (*PFeb* ch.19)

The creation of the ideal nun is associated with the abbess' desire to secure the continuity of the convent's spiritual life according to her own principles. Being aware of the fact that one day she will die, the abbess needs to prepare her successor, who should be a nun with the potential to become an even better abbess than herself. To be highly concerned about her successor is one of the abbess' responsibilities towards her nuns for whom the presence of a pious and exemplary abbess is crucial, as indicated in Irene's Life. On the deathbed of the abbess of Chrysobalanton, Irene and her fellow nuns express in tears, on one hand, their distress at losing their abbess who proved ideal for their instruction, and on the other, they show their anxiety concerning the finding of an abbess equal to her. They say to her:

What will become of us when you leave us? Where shall we find your equal to succeed you as abbess, someone who will love us with deeper care than a mother, being good and meek as you, and bear the burdens of each of us and fulfil the law of Christ amongst us as you have done? (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 25)

Ποῦ τοίνυν ἡμᾶς καταλιμπάνεις, ποῦ ποτε τοιαύτης ἡμεῖς μετὰ σε τύχοιμεν προστάτιδος καὶ μητρὸς κηδεμονικώτερον περὶ ἡμᾶς διατεθειμένης, οὕτως ἀγαθῆς, οὕτω πραεῖας, οὕτως ἐκάστης ἡμῶν τὰ βάρη βασταζούσης καὶ τὸν νόμον ἐν ἡμῖν ἀναπληρούσης τοῦ Χριστοῦ; (*VlIrChrys* p.24.5–9)

The abbess, however, does not share the nuns' anxieties, since she has arranged for her successor. She replies to the nuns:

Why do you disquiet my soul with your crying? In fact, my children, you already possess your future good shepherd. Believe me, she is as superior to me as I am to you owing to my age, and the spirit of God resteth upon her. If you obey my advice not to look for anyone else—, it is your sister Irene I mean. (tr. Rosenqvist 1986: 25)

"Ἴνα τί μου τὴν ψυχὴν συνταράσσετε ὀλοόζουσαι; Ἐχετε, τέκνα, ἔχετε τὴν καλῶς ὑμᾶς ποιμανοῦσαν· πιστεύσατε τοσοῦτον ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς οὖσαν,

ὅσον ἐγὼ τῷ γήρᾳ ὑπὲρ ὑμᾶς, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀναπέπαιται ἐπ' αὐτῇ. Καὶ ἢ ἐμοὶ πείθησθε μὴ ἂν πρὸς ἑτέραν ἀποβλέψαι—, τὴν ἀδελφὴν ὑμῶν Εἰρήνην λέγω. (*VlIrChrys* p.24.12–17)

The notion of continuity is an integral part of the cenobitic life. The abbesses, who in the nuns' Lives choose a nun whom they undertake to train so that she can succeed them, behave like the abbesses whom they themselves used to have. The abbess of a nun's Life was once a nun herself who was also chosen by her abbess and instructed by her in such a way in order to become an abbess herself in due course. Thus the abbess of a nun's Life is recreated in the person of the protagonist nun herself while she was a nun, or causes such a recreation. In Febronia's Passion, the abbess Bryene, who as a nun used to be the favourite of the abbess Platonis whom she finally succeeded, orders her own favourite, Febronia, to perform the tasks she herself used to undertake as the disciple of Platonis. When she was a nun, Bryene was asked, for instance, to read out loud passages from the Bible before the other nuns every Friday (*PFeb* ch.4). Febronia is in turn asked by Bryene every Friday to do the same (*PFeb* ch.6). In her Life, Eupraxia appears to fight against temptation in the same way in which her abbess used to overcome temptation when she herself was a nun (*VEupr* ch.21).

As stated earlier, at some point of her cenobitic career the nun acquires her spiritual independence. This occurs when the nun becomes an abbess herself (Irene of Chrysobalanton) or when she starts behaving like an abbess. Except for Febronia, whose role as a nun is violently interrupted after she has been arrested by the pagan persecutors of Christians, the other heroines examined here become their abbess' doubles.

In the Lives of Irene of Chrysobalanton and Theodora of Thessalonike, the central heroine's independence is associated with the abbess' death. In the case of Irene, her enactment of the role of the abbess after the death of the previous abbess has been examined in the first part of this chapter. As for Theodora, she feels that her real ascetic struggles begin after Anna's death because she is no longer subject to Anna's will, but to her own (*VTheodThess* ch.39.1–4). Theodora does not become the spiritual master just of herself but also that of the other nuns:

Therefore she endured nobly and persevered mightily and fearlessly in the holy monastery like a champion of a battle formation, in no way frightened by the enemy phalanx, but thrusting aside every assault of afflictions which attacked her and her companions and she anointed the souls of the

weaker [sisters] with her own unyielding and steadfast purpose to prepare them for deeds of manly valour and battle against the unseen foe. For since most of those marvellous nuns had departed to the Lord, some before the great [Anna], others after her, no one was left to urge and incite the sisters to obedience with a zeal like hers. [...] She did not cease from her spiritual labour. But she shared with her sisters all the tasks that were imposed on them, zealously sharing their duties, and voluntarily lightening most of their labours. [...] It was her endeavour [...] by her example to make her companions strive together with her in a similar struggle. (tr. Talbot 1996b: 198)

Ἐφερε τοίνυν γενναίως καὶ διεκαρτέρει ἐν τῷ εὐαγεῖ μοναστηρίῳ ὥσπερ τις ἀτρέμας παρατάξεως ἀθλητῆς κραταιότατα, ἐν οὐδενὶ τῆς ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων φάλαγγος δειματουμένη, ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσαν θλιβερῶν προσβολὴν ἐπιούσαν ἑαυτῆς καὶ τῶν μετ' αὐτῆς ἀπωθουμένη, τῷ καθ' ἑαυτὴν ἀνενδότῳ τε καὶ στερρῷ τῆς προθέσεως τῶν ἀσθενεστέρων τὰς ψυχὰς πρὸς ἀνδρείαν καὶ πάλιν τῶν ἀοράτων ἐχθρῶν ἐπαλείφουσα. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ αἱ πλείους τῶν θαυμασιῶν ἐκείνων ἀκουσῶν αἱ μὲν πρὸ τῆς μεγάλης, αἱ δὲ μετ' αὐτὴν πρὸς Κύριον ἐξεδήμησαν, ὑπελείπετο δὲ οὐδεμία, ἣ τῷ κατ' αὐτὴν ζήλῳ τὰς ἀδελφὰς πρὸς ὑπακοὴν διανίστα καὶ διηγείρειν [...] οὐκ ἐπαύετο τῆς πνευματικῆς ἐργασίας· ἀλλ' ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐπικειμέναις φροντίσι κοινωνὸς ὑπῆρχε ταῖς ἀδελφαῖς, τῇ σπουδῇ συμμεριζομένη τὰς φροντίδας καὶ τὸ πλεῖστον τῶν πόνων τῇ προαιρέσει ἐπικουφίζουσα. [...] Τοῦτο δὲ παρ' αὐτῆς ἐσπουδάζετο, ἵνα [...] τῷ καθ' ἑαυτὴν ὑποδείγματι πρὸς τὸν ὁμοιον ἀγῶνα τὰς μετ' αὐτῆς συναμιλλᾶσθαι ποιήσειεν. (VTheodThess ch.39.4–15, 19–23 and 26–28)

Theodora's portrait, as it emerges from the above passage, is that of an abbess. The phalanx of the enemies, against which Theodora as the convent's spiritual superior fights, has a parallel in Irene's fight against a phalanx of demons that enter her cell. Like an abbess, Theodora shows to those nuns who are spiritually inferior the ways to fight against temptations, as she once was taught about them through the former abbess. As is the case with an abbess, Theodora is the exemplary figure of the nunnery through whom the other nuns are disciplined and led to higher levels of spirituality. As the abbess' double, Theodora does everything that would contribute to the salvation of the nuns. Even though the hagiographer calls Theopiste, the new abbess, Theodora's spiritual mother, it is in essence Theodora who becomes Theopiste's spiritual mother, since she appears to have more religious experience and higher spirituality than Theopiste. Theodora can hear divine voices, which Theopiste cannot:

For when all the nuns were sleeping in the narthex of the church, she would often quietly rouse Theopiste and say, "Did you hear the very sweet and melodic angelic psalmody inside the church?" She used to do this, not showing off or boasting of her spiritual favour [granted to her], but, in my opinion, to prepare her own daughter to desire the divine spiritual gifts. (tr. Talbot 1996b: 199)

Ἐν γὰρ τῷ τῆς ἐκκλησίας νάρθηκι, πασῶν τῶν ἀδελφῶν κοιμωμένων, τὴν Θεοπίστην πολλάκις διανιστῶσα ἡρέμα καὶ ἔλεγεν· Ἀκήκοας τῆς ἔνδον ἐν τῷ ναῷ γεναμένης μετὰ μέλους ἡδυτάτης ἀγγελικῆς ψαλμωδίας; Τοῦτο δὲ ἐποίει οὐ φανητιῶσα οὐδὲ κομπάζουσα τῷ χαρίσματι, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐγῶμαι τὴν αὐτῆς θυγατέρα πρὸς ἔφθιν τῶν θείων χαρισμάτων ἐπαλείφουσα. (VTheodThess ch.40.18–25)

By waking up only Theopiste out of all the nuns in order to make her listen to the divine voices, so that, according to the hagiographer's comment, she might be motivated for the acquisition of the divine gifts, Theodora appears once again to behave like an abbess who has her favourite nun.

In the case of Eupraxia, her spiritual independence is manifested in Eupraxia's miracles and ascetic exercises which are even stricter than those of her abbess. Becoming able to perform standing exercises for longer than her abbess, Eupraxia is considered unbeaten by the devil who changes the form of attack he used against her. Instead of attacking her mind, from now on he undertakes to attack her body. Her body proves miraculous, since despite all the violent attacks of the demon nothing serious occurs to it (VEupr chs.22–25). Since the demon's attacks are directed at Eupraxia's body only, confession proves useless for her. Finally Eupraxia substitutes the abbess in her role as miracle-worker (VEupr chs.26–27 and 30–31).

The issue of the nun who behaves like an abbess brings us back to the beginning of this analysis, which refers to the role of the abbess. At this point it becomes quite clear that the Life of the abbess and that of the nun are complementary: the one can be read through the other and vice-versa. During her life in a convent, a holy nun acquires in the first place an *obedient* body, that is a body, which acts according to the rules, the orders and the teachings of the abbess whose *exemplary* body provides her with religious authority. When the holy nun becomes spiritually independent, she performs the role of the abbess without being an abbess. The nun's initially obedient body, which after her spiritual independence becomes miraculous and exemplary, provides her with the religious authority that the holy abbess possesses.

CHAPTER 5

“She Adorned Herself with Wounds as with Pearls”: The Holy Wife’s Body and its Spatial Performances

Introduction

In the last two decades, several studies have appeared that examine gender in relation to space (see, e.g. Ardener 1993; Duncan 1996; Massey 1994). The aim of these studies is twofold: to map the spaces inhabited by men and women in different societies and to explore gender relations as determined by space. According to the conclusions drawn in these studies gender is interrelated with space to such a high degree that space appears to be “gendered”, whereas gender is “spatialised”. As Doreen Massey notes, the intersections between “geography” and “gender” are wide and manifold. The one is involved with the construction of the other: geography influences the formation of genders and gender relations whereas gender affects highly the production of the “geographical”. “Spaces and places”, as Massey puts it, “are not only themselves gendered but in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood” (Massey 1994: 180). Massey goes on to say that in the West, where societies are male-dominated, men have used space in order to define male and female identities and to exercise power over women. The distinction between the domains of the public and the private, which are determined spatially—the public refers to the outside whereas the private refers to the inside—applies to gender difference. The public sphere is reserved for men, while the domestic realm has been thought of as the women’s place. Through the confinement of women’s movements to the limits of domesticity, men can control them both spatially and socially (Massey 1994: 178–180).

In the work of the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, the concept of space, both in its literal and figurative sense, is of vital importance, since Irigaray considers it as the means by which her project of

sexual difference can be realised. Through her writings, Irigaray aims at establishing the autonomy of the two sexes because she believes that women will exist culturally and intellectually only if they manage to differentiate themselves from men entirely and thus become the “other of the other”. In the philosophical tradition of the West, as Irigaray points out, man is the subject of culture and knowledge, whereas woman is silenced. Until now (wo)man is defined in relation to man which renders her the “other of the same”, that is, an imperfect man. This occurs because, unlike man, woman does not have a genealogy, a culture, a knowledge, a discourse, nor even a name of her own that would allow her to speak and write as a person who exists independently from man and his culture.

Woman is deprived of her own space in culture and knowledge because man has used her as his own space. As Irigaray formulates it, woman “is assigned to be place without occupying a place. Through her, place would be set up for man’s use but not hers [...] Traditionally spacing is created or occupied by man, child, housework, cooking. Not by the woman herself *for herself*” (Irigaray 1993: 52, 70). By being his mother and lover, woman offers man through her body and existence the space and the habitation he needs both physically and emotionally in order to locate himself and construct his own identity. This has, as an effect, woman’s identification with the corporeal, which, being inferior to the spiritual with which man as her other identifies, is presented as weakness, disability or lack. Through woman, who as man’s space acquires the status of the object, man is positioned as a subject that controls society and the world.

Irigaray claims that as long as woman remains man’s place she cannot have a place for herself. “Woman ought to be able to find herself, among other things, through the images of herself already deposited in history and the conditions of production of the work of man, and not on the basis of his work, his genealogy” (Irigaray 1993: 10). Woman will not cease to be an object, man’s container, and will never become a partner if she does not take up a space that will enable her to express herself, her individuality and her desires. Only when she liberates herself from male domination and definition will she be treated as equal with man and will become a subject.

The gendered aspects of space as outlined by both feminist geographers and Irigaray are also valid for Byzantine society, since its struc-

tures were patriarchal (Herrin 1983). From the ninth until the late eleventh centuries, when the nuclear family was a central component of Byzantine society, most women were confined to the narrow family circle. Thus the spaces occupied by men and the ones inhabited by women (particularly aristocratic women) were strictly defined; they were separated both socially and spatially. In contrast to men, most women had almost no public life; their place was at home, yet they were not the ones who dominated domestic life, they were not even allowed to frequent all domestic spaces. Their movements and activities were limited to a certain domestic room called the *gynaikeion* built especially for them. In the case of most women of the aristocracy, the *gynaikeion* was guarded by eunuchs whose role was to secure their isolation (Ringrose 2003: 203). In general, Byzantine women were expected during some periods to undertake only domestic tasks such as childrearing, cooking, spinning, weaving and embroidering (Angold 1995: 426–440; Garland 1988; Talbot 1997). The periods in which Byzantine women enjoyed more social liberties were before the ninth and after the eleventh centuries. For instance in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, with the loosening of the traditional family, women of the aristocracy again became socially active (Kazhdan and Epstein 1985: 99–102; Laiou 1981; Reinsch 2000).

That in certain periods of Byzantine history women were expected not to frequent public spaces was a social reality, which influenced Byzantine literary production. Such literary examples constitute some of the Lives of holy wives, who were individuals venerated for serving God through their marital status. The holy wives are sanctified because they surpass the limits of their female gender by crossing the boundaries of the domestic space assigned to them and because they are punished by their husbands for doing that. In their case, the influence that space has on gender relations is very graphically illustrated. The heroines are attacked by their husbands as soon as the latter realise that they cannot control their wives' spatial movements. The holy wives have, without their husbands' consent, enlarged the spaces they frequent and left behind their domestic tasks in order to engage in religious tasks. The gender conflict appearing in these Lives, due to the heroines' spatial and gender transgressions, is equated by the hagiographers with a Christian conflict. Following Christ's teaching, the pious wife wishes to go out in order to visit the church and look after the needy, but her "villain" and

"unfaithful" husband does not let her. He prevents her from serving God and from becoming spiritually better.

My intention in this final chapter is to examine the function of space and its relation to holy wives' bodily performances as depicted in their Lives. For my analysis, I will use as critical tools the works of feminist geographers and Irigaray, since their spatialisation of gender difference is brought to the fore in a very interesting way in the texts examined here. I think that some of the Lives of holy wives can be interpreted and understood better in the light of this research.

The elements of Irigaray's theory that will be used are mainly taken from her work *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (1984). As has been mentioned, Irigaray resorts to the metaphor of space, which she employs in various ways to secure a female space against male authority. Her theoretical approach to the concept of space is applicable to some of the holy wives' Lives where the heroines create a space of their own both to liberate themselves from their oppressive husbands and also to exist as individuals. This space can be called religious or Christian and lies outside the boundaries of their families and homes. As Thomaïs, one of the heroines, puts it: "*I would rather be abject in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of sinners*" (Ps. 84.10; tr. Halsall 1996: 308; *VThom* ch.9). With the expression "*tents of sinners*", Thomaïs refers to her husband whom she considers a sinner because he makes her suffer. Her visits to the church and her charitable activities undertaken in the name of God provide her with the reason she needs to escape for a while from her husband's house. Another heroine, Matrona, despises her husband to such a high degree that she prefers to cohabit with demons rather than with him:

She went to the region of Beirut. She found there a temple of idols and dwelled therein, choosing to be devoured by demons or beasts rather than fall into the hands of her husband. Said she, "If I serve God, demons cannot harm me. As for beasts, if I truly and piously pursue virtue, perhaps they will respect me; but if my husband gets hold of me, he will treat me more cruelly than demons and beasts." (tr. Featherstone, in Featherstone and Mango 1996: 34)

παραγίνεται εἰς τὰ μέρη Βηρυτοῦ, κάκεισε εὐρούσα ναὸν εἰδώλων ὥκησεν ἐν αὐτῷ ἐλομένη μᾶλλον ὑπὸ δαιμόνων ἢ θηρίων ἀναλωθῆναι ἢ εἰς τὰς χεῖρας τοῦ ἀνδρὸς αὐτῆς περιπεσεῖν. Ἐλεγεν γὰρ ὅτι "δαίμονες Θεῷ δουλεύουσάν με ἀδικῆσαι οὐ δύνανται, θῆρες δὲ τὴν ἀρετὴν, εἰ γνησίως καὶ εὐλαβῶς μετέρχομαι, τιμήσωσιν ἴσως, ὁ δὲ ἀνὴρ, εἰ χειρώσεταιί με, καὶ δαιμόνων καὶ θηρίων πικρότερος ἔσται." (*VMatr* ch.14)

The role of the holy wife is manifested in the Passion of Anastasia the Roman (*PAnastRom BHG* 81–81a), and six female Lives: the Lives of Matrona (*VMatr BHG* 1221), Theophano (*VTheoph BHG* 1794), Thomaïs of Lesbos (*VThom BHG* 2454), Mary the Younger (*VMarIun BHG* 1164) and Theodora of Arta (*VTheodAr BHG* 1736). The Lives of Theophano (900) and Theodora of Arta (thirteenth century) will not be discussed here because the analysis attempted is based on narrative elements, which, while being central in the other Lives, are absent from these two texts. Both Theophano and Theodora of Arta are empresses and this might account for the difference in their hagiographical treatment, which imposes on their Lives narrative structures quite different from those of the other holy wives' Lives. Due to their lower social status, the other holy wives lead different lives. They have more freedom of movement than an empress and their charitable work takes the form of services in which an empress is not expected to engage. Anastasia the Roman, for instance, the only one of the holy wives examined here who belongs to the aristocracy, has to disguise herself as a poor woman in order to be able to visit the prisons where the martyrs are kept and look after their wounds. As empresses, Theophano and Theodora of Arta undertake other forms of religious and charitable activities, not directly but through their servants, such as the distribution of money to the poor and the foundation of monasteries.

Theophano's Life is exceptional also in that she, unlike all the other holy wives, is not depicted as suffering at the hands of her husband, emperor Leo VI (886–912) but is portrayed as having a harmonious relationship with him.¹ In contrast to the other holy wives, she is praised not only for her secret ascetic life and charitable works but also for being a good wife and for looking after her husband. Gender conflict, the kernel of the Lives of the other holy wives, is thus absent from Theophano's Life. As regards Theodora's Life, her husband Michael II Komnenos Doukas (ca. 1231–1267/68) sends her into exile after falling in love with another woman and not for her public/Christian life, as is the case with the other holy wives oppressed by their husbands. In Theodora's Life, space does not have the centrality and the functions it has in the Lives that will be discussed here.

¹ The Life of Patriarch Euthymios (*BHG* 651; date: tenth century), on the other hand, informs us that Theophano's marriage was not fortunate (*VEuthymPatr* chs. 6–7). Of course, if Theophano's Life was commissioned by her husband Leo, it is not surprising that their marriage appears to be happy in this Life (Dagron 1994).

Accordingly, four texts will be considered here. Anastasia's Passion and the Life of Matrona have been presented earlier.² There are two anonymous Lives of Thomaïs: the longer one, which will be examined here, is dated to the mid-tenth century, whereas the other is not datable (Halsall 1996: 291–295). Thomaïs is the only child of a couple exemplary for its piety, who remained childless for years. When Thomaïs reaches the age of twenty-four her parents marry her off to a man called Stephen who appears to be a real torturer. Being against her pious life, her works of charity and her frequent absence from home, he beats her violently. Thomaïs dies after thirteen years of suffering at the hands of her husband.

The fourth text, the Life of Mary the Younger, is also anonymous. Angeliki Laiou dates it to the eleventh or twelfth century, more precisely after 1025, that is, much later than the time in which Mary actually lived (Laiou 1996: 239–252). According to the chronology of Mary established by Laiou, Mary must have died ca. 903 (Laiou 1996: 241). Mary is a married woman who devotes her time to the church, prayer and almsgiving. After she has been accused by her brother and sister-in-law for giving away the property of her family and for committing adultery with a slave, her husband confines her in her room. One day, Nikephoros, her husband, angry after being falsely informed that his wife calls him Satan, beats her violently. In her attempt to escape, she hurts her head and dies a few days later.

The following analysis has a tripartite structure. The first two parts ("Public Performances" and "The Domestic Body") refer to the spaces where the heroines lead their lives. The last part ("Saintly Afterlife: The Place of the Holy Wife") refers to the spaces the holy women inhabit in their afterlives.

Public Performances

A frequent motif appearing in Byzantine Lives of virgin holy women is the heroines' rebellion against both their parents and the traditions of their patriarchal societies by refusing to enter into matrimony.³ World-

² See above, p. 25 and pp. 95–96.

³ As is the case in every patriarchal society, marriage and the procreation of children were the primary tasks the women of Byzantine society had to undertake (Laiou 1981: 233–241; Talbot 1997: 121–125).

ly marriage is condemned in these texts, whereas the heroines' spiritual marriage with Christ appears to be the ideal state. In the Life of Euphrosyne for example, matrimony is called by Euphrosyne "the world of injustice" and is presented as a *miasma* the heroine longs to avoid (*VEuphr* ch.7.10–11). By rejecting marriage, holy women disappoint their parents (especially their fathers) who expect their only daughters to become the inheritors of their vast fortunes (cf. Saints Melania and Euphrosyne). The holy women's practice of virginity also endangers the stability of their societies, which are based on the relations of kinship created by the exchange of women among men through the marriage pact. The heroines' disobedience of their parents and their indifference to the values of their societies are, of course, treated by their hagiographers as specimens of exemplary behaviour. Such a denial of family and social obligations is expected by Christ's followers, as is made explicit by some hagiographers who paraphrase Christ's words: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters [...] he cannot be a disciple of mine" (Lk. 14.26–27).

From the ninth century on, more Lives venerating married women are produced in Byzantium than earlier. The married holy heroines either become widows who follow the monastic life, find the violent death of a martyr or end their earthly lives as lay wives or widows.⁴ That the Byzantine hagiographers of this period show a greater interest in married heroines than their predecessors, and especially the occurrence in the tenth and eleventh centuries of two hagiographical texts (*VThom* and *VMarIun*) in which the heroines never leave their married lives behind, have led certain scholars to the conclusion that the Lives of married holy women constitute an affirmation of marriage (Laiou 1989; Laiou 1996: 249–250; Patlagean 1976: 617–622).

According to Laiou, the hagiographers' positive attitude towards marriage can be attributed to historical reality: there was no conflict between the Church and the state as regards marriage in the period from the end of the ninth until the end of the tenth century. This was due to the leg-

⁴ There are nine such holy women: Theodora of Thessalonike, Athanasia of Aegina and Theodora of Arta enter convents after their husbands die. Anastasia the Roman receives the crown of the martyr. Mary the Younger, Thomaïs, Martha, the mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger, and the empresses Theodora and Theophano are sanctified as lay wives (Mary the Younger and Thomaïs) or widows (Martha and empress Theodora).

islation of Leo VI, which established the interference of the state and the church in the regulation of marriage. Both the emperor and the patriarch appeared to praise marriage officially by presenting it as a valuable gift offered by God to human beings (Laiou 1989: 237–238). Leo's law could possibly be one of the reasons for the production of more Lives devoted to married women than earlier but I am not convinced that these texts show a change in the hagiographical treatment of marriage. Such a change would contradict Christ's words, according to which, his disciples should "hate" their families. In fact, none of the married holy women appears to look forward to marriage. On the contrary many of them are against marriage but in the end have to accept it as their destiny. It is not a coincidence that the husbands of widowed holy nuns or abbesses, such as Theodora of Thessalonike and Athanasia of Aegina, die relatively early thus enabling their wives to do what they always longed for, namely to enter a convent. For this reason the deaths of their husbands cause them no distress, as the example of Theodora of Thessalonike indicates:

The blessed Theodora, after observing at home the third and ninth day commemoration of her husband, bade farewell to all worldly affairs. For she did not view the loss of her husband as a grievous [affliction], but revealed to all the heart-felt desire for the monastic habit which [she had felt] for many years. (tr. Talbot 1996b: 180)

ἡ μακαρία Θεοδώρα, τὰ τρίτα καὶ ἑνατα τοῦ ἀνδρὸς οἴκοι τετέλεσσα, τοῖς τοῦ κόσμου πᾶσι χαίρειν εἰποῦσα καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἐρημίαν εἰς οὐδὲν τῶν θλιβερῶν θεμένη, τὴν ἐν πολλοῖς ἔτεσι τοῦ μοναδικοῦ τάγματος ἐγκάρδιον ἔφεσιν προὔπτον τοῖς πᾶσι τέθηκε. (*VTheodThess* ch.19.8–12)

The positive way in which the Byzantine church treated marriage after Leo's law is a reality that is distorted in the Lives of holy wives, despite the fact that some hagiographers appear to praise marriage. The hagiographer of Thomaïs, for example, equates virginity with matrimony by calling both states "praised and respected" (*VThom* ch.6). The holy wives' behaviour, on the other hand, suggests that marriage is something despicable and undermines statements such as the one made by Thomaïs' hagiographer.

Consequently even though saintly wives, unlike holy virgins, appear to obey their parents and be faithful to the traditions of their societies by

marrying and giving birth to children,⁵ they are, in fact, no less anti-matrimonial than the virgin holy women.⁶ The difference between the virgins and the wives is that the first rebel against matrimony by not engaging in it, whereas the latter show their anti-matrimonial behaviour in their marriages. The following analysis indicates that the negative attitude towards marriage written in the Lives of holy virgins is repeated in the Lives of holy wives. However, the ambiguous way in which the anti-matrimonial ideology is expressed in the Lives of holy wives makes these texts seem less anti-matrimonial than they are in reality. This may on one hand, be due to Leo's legislation and on the other to the social reality of the time in which these Lives were produced. As already mentioned, by the ninth century Byzantine society had undergone an important change: the nuclear family and woman's role within it acquired a great significance (Kazhdan and Epstein 1985: 99–104). This social change may be another reason for which Lives of married holy women were written in the period from the ninth until the eleventh century (Patlagean 1976: 617 and 1981).

In a patriarchal society, the good married woman is defined as the one who submerges herself in her family, existing only as wife, mother and housekeeper. All her activities, most of which should take place within the domestic boundaries, should be directed towards the service of her family and her main aim through performing them should be to please her lord, that is her husband. This is also the official attitude of the Church towards wives, with roots in the apostle Paul's teachings, according to which a wife's duty is to please her husband (1 Cor. 7.34) to whom she is subjected (Eph. 5.22–24).

The holy wives are neither good wives, good mothers nor house-

⁵ Anastasia the Roman and Thomaïs are the only childless holy wives. Anastasia is not expected to have children, since she manages to remain a virgin. As for Thomaïs, her lack of children does not become an issue in her Life. In contrast to Thomaïs' parents, who bring her to the world after innumerable prayers in which they ask God to grant them a child, Thomaïs shows no interest in having children. This could be seen as implied act of anti-family behaviour, especially when one takes into consideration the way the other holy wives treat their children, see further pp. 177–178.

⁶ The only Life of a holy wife which could be considered as affirming marriage is that of the empress Theophano. The Life of Theodora of Arta, too, may not be anti-matrimonial, since in the end the heroine is reconciled with her husband and ends up leading a happy family life.

holders, since, unlike the traditional women of their societies, they do not exist for their families and households but for Christ, to whom they are "totally devoted", as, for instance, the hagiographer of Thomaïs points out (καὶ ὅλην ὅλου γεγονυῖαν Χριστοῦ; *VThom* ch.2). The heroines examined here consider not their husbands but God as their only lord, whom they strive to please by devoting to him all their time, possessions and both bodily and spiritual energies.

The statement of Mary the Younger echoing the apostle Paul, according to which she acknowledges her husband as her master (*VMarlun* ch.7) does not represent her real relation to him. The fact that she gives all her money to charity without her husband's consent indicates that she does not treat him as her master. In addition, even though her husband punishes her for her behaviour, she does not cease to help the needy financially, an act which marks her resolution not to let her husband control her decisions and behaviour. Anastasia the Roman and Matrona do not even allow sexual intercourse and thus disregard Paul's commandment that a wife should not deny bodily contact with her husband without his consent (1 Cor. 5).

The holy wives under examination here are depicted as serving God by undertaking activities which take place mostly outside their home: visits to churches and charitable works. During their involvement in God-pleasing activities, the heroines' bodies or certain parts of them play a central role. The heroines' bodies appear to be the only means through which they can realise their religious tasks. The visits of Mary the Younger to the church prove to be bodily discomforts. She walks to the church, which is far away from where she lives, twice a day: in the morning and in the evening, in spite of bad weather conditions and the fact that she has to wade through a river in order to reach the church. As soon as she arrives, she kneels in a hidden spot and stays in this position until her sweat, a sign of her weariness, washes the floor (*VMarlun* ch.3). Thomaïs too seems to exhaust herself in order to carry out her religious undertakings. Her hagiographer does not fail to praise her feet which are continuously in God's service. All the movements of her feet are directed towards the churches and charitable activities. The only instance in which her feet stay immobile is when she keeps overnight vigil:

Her feet walked eagerly to the divine churches and kept vigil there all the night, her feet stood always in an even place. O feet which frequently moved

toward [acts of] generosity, and always preferred to walk in paradise, O truly blessed feet! (tr. Halsall 1996: 304)

πόδες πρὸς τοὺς θεῖους ναοὺς προθύμως βαδίζοντες καὶ τῇ παννύχῳ στάσει προσμένοντες· πόδες ἐστῶτες αἰ ἐν εὐθύτητι· ὧ πόδες θαμινὰ πρὸς δόσιν κινούμενοι, πόδες ἐν παραδείσῳ βαδίζειν αἰ προαιρούμενοι· πόδες τῷ ὄντι μακάριοι. (*VThom* ch.6)

Thomaïs' hands are also venerated for their works:

She put her whole hand to the spindle. She worked skilfully and artfully to weave on the loom fabrics of various colours. Her hands made cloth and the bellies of the poor ate to their content. Her hands laboured for the sake of the poor and wove tunics for the naked. (tr. Halsall 1996: 303–304)

ὅλον τὸν πῆχυν ἀτράκτῳ προσήρειδεν· ὅσα τε περὶ τὸν ἰστὸν καὶ ὅσα ποικίλῃν ἔχει τὴν ὕφανσιν, καλῶς ἐτεχνούργει καὶ τεχνήντως ἐξύφαινε· αἱ χεῖρες αὐτῆς ἐποίησαν ὕφασμα, καὶ γαστέρες πενήτων εἰς κόρον κατέφαγον· χεῖρες ἀπόρων χάριν μογοῦσαι, χεῖρες χιτωνίσκους τοῖς γυμνητεύουσιν ἐξυφαίνουσαι. (*VThom* ch.6)

Weaving was one of the skills reserved for the women of medieval societies and it was seen as an obligation of wives to clothe the members of their families. Women of lower classes even contributed to the economy of their households by selling the cloth they made (Talbot 1997: 126, 130). A skill she was meant to acquire in order to serve the needs of her family is used here by Thomaïs not for this very purpose but for charity. Her hands make the cloth that covers the bodies of the naked.

The works of Thomaïs' hands are also miraculous. The liquids which she touches cover the bodies of the diseased and cure them. A man paralysed for thirty-eight years who suffers from inflammation of the throat is healed by anointing his body with the water in which Thomaïs has washed her hands (*VThom* ch.11). Another man possessed by the devil falls before her feet and is healed by the oil with which she anoints his body:

A man tormented by a demon suddenly sprang out [and] rolled in front of the feet of the blessed [Thomaïs], calling out loudly, and revealing the power of the virtue which she had kept hidden for a long time: "How long will you hide yourself, O servant of God, and be unwilling to proclaim these works clearly? Let God's name be magnified through you. Reveal to me as wondrous, Thomaïs, the mercy of God. Let my repentance be proclaimed through you and immediate forgiveness for my sins, because of which I

am now punished by God's will. And I beg [you], while rolling at your holy feet, make yourself manifest. Show that the God of wonders works great wonders through you. Let the [demon] who overpowers me be crushed by your hand. Let the Adversary [the Devil] be crushed by the might of your power. *The pangs of death compassed me; the dangers of hell found me* (Ps. 116.3). How long might the demon move the hand of Briareos against me?" These things he called out to the Lord through Thomaïs. The saint was then inclined to mercy and spread out her arms to God, from Whom *every perfect gift* (James 1.17) is sent down. And after she rubbed her hands with oil from the utterly pure Mother of the Word and anointed the aforementioned [demoniac], one could immediately see the demoniac being completely cured. (tr. Halsall 1996: 309–310)

αἰφνης τις ἀνέθορεν ἄνθρωπος ὀχλούμενος ὑπὸ δαίμονος· ὃς πρὸ τῶν ποδῶν τῆς μακαρίας προκυλινδούμενος οὕτω τρανῶς ἀνεβόα, τῆς ἀρετῆς δεικνύων τὴν δύναμιν, ἣν κεκρυμμένην εἶχεν ἐπὶ πολὺ· "Ἐως πότε κρύπτεις σεαυτήν, ὧ δούλη Θεοῦ, καὶ οὐ τὰ ἔργα ταῦτα σαφῶς ἀνακηρύττειν ἐθέλεις; μεγαλυνθήτω τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ σοῦ· θαυμάστωσον ἐπ' ἐμέ, Θωμαΐς, τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ· κηρυχθήτω μετάνοια διὰ σοῦ καὶ ἄφεσις τῶν ἐμῶν ἁμαρτημάτων ἐξ ὑπογούου, δι' ἧ καὶ παραχωρήσει Θεοῦ κολάζομαι τήμερον· καὶ δέομαι τῶν σῶν προκυλινδούμενος ἀγίων ποδῶν, φανέρωσον σεαυτήν· δείξον ὅτι θαυμάσια μεγάλα τερατουργεῖ διὰ σοῦ ὁ τῶν θαυμασιῶν Θεός· ὁ ἰσχυρὸς ἐπ' ἐμοὶ διὰ τῆς σῆς θραυσθήτω χειρός· ὁ ὑπεναντίος συντριβήτω τῷ πλήθει τῆς δυνάμεως· περισχον με ὡδίνες θανάτου, κίνδυνοι ἔδου εὐροσάν με· ἔως πότε τὴν Βριαρέω χειρα κατ' ἐμοῦ κινήσειε τὸ δαιμόνιον;" Ταῦτα διὰ τῆς Θωμαΐδος ἐπεβοᾶτο πρὸς Κύριον· τῆς γοῦν ἀγίας ἐπικαμφθείσης πρὸς ἔλεον καὶ τὰς χεῖρας ἐκπετασάσης πρὸς Θεόν, ἀφ' οὗ πᾶν δώρημα τέλειον καταπέμπεται, εἴθ' οὕτως ἐλαίου τῆς ὑπεράγνου τοῦ Λόγου μητρὸς τὰς χεῖρας ἀναλειψάσης καὶ τὸν ῥηθέντα χρισάσης, ἣν ὁρᾶν εὐθὺς τὸν δαιμονῶντα τελείως ἰαθέντα. (*VThom* ch.10)

According to the miracle scene presented above, the stranger who is possessed by the devil comes to interrupt Thomaïs' participation in a religious procession. His extremely loud voice stops her from concentrating and makes her lose for a moment the spiritual communication that she establishes with the divine through her prayer. The man asks for Thomaïs' attention, he wants her to leave behind what she is doing and cure him. In this highly dramatic scene, the protagonist roles are enacted by both the possessed man and Thomaïs. The performance of the man's role is different from that of Thomaïs in that he speaks. His loud voice allows him to make his presence more apparent. Thomaïs, on the

other hand, does not speak. She only acts and she does so with her hands. The movements of her hands respond to the man's request for her to "crush" with her hand the devil that dwells inside him.

The healing of the possessed man is the first of the five miracles performed by Thomaïs during her lifetime.⁷ The hagiographer relates Thomaïs' other four miracles one after the other, immediately after he has recounted the one quoted above, which appears to be the most important. Its importance is underscored from a narrative point of view: it occupies the longest textual space and it is narrated first, accordingly being the one that establishes the heroine's holiness.

In her public life Thomaïs liberates possessed persons from Satan, while in her private life she is confronted by a man who is likened to Satan:

He was opposing her like a Satan. How many times he heard from her, "*Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.*" (Mk. 8.33; tr. Halsall 1996: 305)

ὁ δὲ ἀντικειμένως ἐφρόνει καθὰ τις Σατᾶν ποσάκις ἤκουε παρ' αὐτῆς "Ἔπαγε ὀπίσω μου, Σατανᾶ· οὐ φρονεῖς τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων." (VThom ch.7)

Because he behaves like a devil, Stephen eventually becomes the abode of the devil who causes him bodily suffering. After Thomaïs' death Stephen becomes possessed (VThom ch.25). This is his punishment for punishing his wife. In contrast to Thomaïs' tortures, which last for thirteen years, his sufferings do not last, since he finds a quick cure at her tomb.

Thomaïs' private life is the exact opposite of her public life. In her private life, she is humiliated and violated, whereas in her public life she is honoured and sanctified. Unlike the people whom Thomaïs encounters in her public life, Stephen is unable to see his wife's individuality, her virtues and miraculous powers. In Irigaray's words, Stephen "cannot see the other [his wife] in h[er] alterity" (Irigaray 1993: 168). For him Thomaïs "remains in darkness". That is why he fails to understand her and the Christian life she leads:

For her actions were regarded as going against her husband and were

⁷ None of the other heroines examined here performs any miracles while enacting the role of the holy wife.

reckoned extravagant, and she was condemned for living in a prodigal fashion and was criticised and scorned for squandering the livelihood. But [her actions] were rather mercy carried out in accordance with the divine and holy scriptures, mercy. [...] Such actions were considered to be in vain, but the person who does not do evil is viewed as evil by evil people; the prudent person [is viewed] as foolish by the licentious; the brave person is reviled by the craven as over bold; and charity to the poor is suspiciously viewed as prodigality. (tr. Halsall 1996: 314; corr. Rosenqvist 1997: 190)

καὶ γὰρ ἐναντία τῷ ταύτης ἀνδρὶ τὰ δρώμενα ἐνομίζετο καὶ δαπανηρὰ ἐλογίζετο· καὶ ὡς ἀσώτως βιοῦσα κατεγινώσκετο καὶ ὡς τὸν βίον ἀναλοῦσα διελιοδορεῖτο καὶ ἀνυβρίζετο· τὸ δὲ μᾶλλον, ἔλεος ἦν κατὰ τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἱερὰ θεσπίσματα ἐκπληρούμενον ἔλεον. [...] Μάταιον τὸ τοιοῦτον λελόγισται ἀλλὰ καὶ κακὸς ὁ μὴ δρῶν τὴν κακίαν παρὰ κακοῖς νομίζεται καὶ λογίζεται καὶ ὁ σῶφρων ἡλίθιος παρ' ἀκολάστοις ἐστὶ καὶ ὁ ἀνδρεῖος παρὰ τοῖς δειλοῖς ὡς θρασὺς τις κακίζεται καὶ ἀσωτία ὑποτοπάζεται ἢ πρὸς τοὺς πένητας δόσις. (VThom ch.15)

Stephen's misunderstanding of Thomaïs is the reason for their domestic conflict. In fact, Thomaïs is also responsible for this very conflict. She could make Stephen see her and her miraculous powers in the fashion she makes herself visible before the possessed man and the people present at the miracle scene. As has been already stated, for Thomaïs Stephen is the personification of Satan. Instead of using her spiritual and miraculous powers to convince him to adopt God-pleasing behaviour, she completely excludes him from the religious space she creates for herself. She never treats him as her other half, as an individual with whom she could have a common life in Christ. The same behaviour is performed by most of the holy wives examined here. They do not contribute to their husbands' salvation, as is the task of every Christian wife according to the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 7.16).

Anastasia, to mention another example, does not initiate her pagan husband into the Christian religion, but the martyr Cecilia for instance does so, converting her husband to Christianity on their wedding night (PCaec chs.3–5). Unlike Cecilia, Anastasia is not interested in her husband's salvation but in her own. Her wish that her husband Pouplios becomes a Christian, expressed in the first letter she addresses to her spiritual father, is related to her own salvation. If Pouplios converts, he will allow her to look after the wounded Christians and to use her money for charitable activities, acts which secure the salvation of her own soul.

As the examples of Thomaïs and Anastasia demonstrate, the holy wives and their husbands ("the feminine and the masculine") "are two signs that never see each other" (Irigaray 1993: 167). The reason why they should not "see each other" and thus be in lifelong conflict lies in the anti-matrimonial ideology of the Lives. If the couples had established a harmonious relationship then their marriage would have acquired positive significance.

The notions of visibility and invisibility of an individual's life and character acquire importance in the Life of Thomaïs because of their association with the binary opposition of the external and the internal, or the outside and the inside. Thomaïs is presented as beautiful in appearance but as more beautiful in her soul, which cannot be seen (*VThom* ch.4). Later in the narrative, she is described as an individual who has a female body but male virtues (*VThom* ch.5). In other words, the surface of her body shows a woman but its inside, its soul, is male. At some other point in the narrative the hagiographer says:

As [Thomaïs] grew up, she continued to be strengthened in the virtues, devoted to the worship of God, and adorned by all forms of goodness. She disclosed her hidden beauty by its external manifestation and revealed the grace of her soul by her bodily features; [revealing her] invisible [virtues] by the visible, her internal [virtues] by her external [beauty]. One could see in her a perfect bodily harmony, which suggested the spiritual beauty [of her soul]. (tr. Halsall 1996: 302)

Ἡῤῥᾱνε γοῦν ἐκεῖνο καὶ ταῖς ἀρεταῖς ἐκρατύνετο, θεοσεβεῖα προσκείμενον καὶ πάσαις ἀγαθῶν ιδέαις κοσμούμενον· καὶ τὸ κρυπτόμενον κάλλος τῷ φαινόμενῳ καὶ ἔξωθεν ὑπεδείκνυε καὶ ταῖς σωματικαῖς ιδιότησι τὰς ψυχικὰς ἐνέφαινε χάριτας, ταῖς γνωρίμοις τὰς ἀφανεῖς, ταῖς ἐκτὸς τὰς ἐντός· καὶ ἦν ἰδεῖν ἁρμονίαν ἀρίστην σωματικὴν, τὴν πνευματικὴν καλλομένην ὑπεμφαίνουσαν. (*VThom* ch.6)

As Thomaïs grows up before her marriage, the part of her beauty which is internal and therefore invisible comes to be visible through its reflection on her body. Her body is the space in which her invisible self is now visualised.

After her marriage, and due to the way she leads her married life, Thomaïs enters a new phase as far as the visible and invisible elements of her personality are concerned. During this time she succeeds in obtaining a high spirituality which remains hidden until the man possessed

by the devil is introduced into the narrative (see the miracle discussed above). This man refers to the notions of visibility and invisibility in a remarkable way, which contributes to the dramatic character of the scene. Lying before Thomaïs' feet, the man asks her to reveal herself, that is, to disclose her ability to perform miracles by healing him. This time Thomaïs' hidden spirituality is not externalised on her own body, but on the body of someone else, which becomes the space in which her identity as a saint is projected. Nevertheless, Thomaïs' own body does not cease to play a vital role in the externalisation of her invisible self. Her hands are the instruments through which her invisible powers become an object of the gaze.

The anti-family ideology of the examined texts is also sustained by their treatment of motherhood. The holy wives having children (Matrona and Mary the Younger) are not traditional mothers. They are not depicted as devoting any time to their children's upbringing or education. This occurs since their Lives aim at demonstrating their full commitment to God. As mothers, Matrona and Mary the Younger are also differentiated from the mothers of saints as portrayed in some Lives. Saints' mothers (especially those of male saints) play a decisive role in their religious careers, for they are the ones undertaking their Christian education. Martha, for instance, the mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger, is even sanctified due to her exemplary motherhood, which is equated with that of the Virgin who constituted the model of ideal motherhood in Byzantium (Kalavrezou 1990).⁸ Martha ascends to holiness because she creates a saint: not only does she initiate her son into Christianity but she also inspires him with such great zeal for God that he decides to abandon his worldly life in order to serve God. Martha is thus venerated for considering her son's salvation as more important than her own.

Matrona embodies the exact opposite to Martha: her own salvation is what matters to her and she considers both her husband Dometianos and her daughter Theodote obstacles to that achievement. Unlike Thomaïs' mother Kale, who becomes a nun after fulfilling her roles as wife and mother, Matrona abandons her family in order to enter a male monastery.

⁸ Cf. the apostle Paul's remark that woman can be saved through motherhood (1 Tim. 2.15).

In doing this, she transgresses not only her roles as a wife and mother but also the limits of her female gender. In comparison with the other holy wives examined here, Matrona is the most unconventional one, since she leaves behind her a family that puts limits on her movements. However, in order to achieve complete liberation from her family and social obligations as a woman, she has to renounce even her own gender. As for Mary, she is released from her obligations as a mother and this does not seem to affect her, since her first two sons die at a very young age, and not long after she has given birth to twin sons, she herself dies.

The holy wives' presentation as anti-matrimonial is part of their hagiographers' strategy to establish their holiness, which, due to its laity, is called into question. By failing to deal with family matters and daily problems, the heroines manage to liberate themselves from the very worldly cares that the other holy women leave behind by renouncing the world. The issue of the holy wives' sanctity in relation to the other roles of female sainthood will be further explored in the last part of this chapter.

The Domestic Body

The heroines' attempts to establish themselves as subjects by denying their patriarchal roles and by assuming their own independence through religious practices provoke their husbands' violent reactions. The husbands employ violence in order to manifest their authority, which has been put into question by their wives' behaviour. The husbands' right to punish their wives is acknowledged also by the heroines themselves. Echoing Paul's words in his Letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 5.23), Mary the Younger describes her position in her society and family: it is defined in relation to her husband, whom she understands as her natural master ("But I know that I am not the mistress of my body, but that you are my head." tr. Laiou 1996: 263; νῦν δὲ οἶδα ὅτι οὐκ ἐξουσιάζω τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλὰ σύ μου εἶ κεφαλή. *VMarIun* ch.7). Mary goes on to say to her husband Nikephoros that he should punish her if he thinks she has spent the family money on luxuries and stupid things (*VMarIun* ch.7). By making this statement, Mary presents herself as part of her husband's possessions, which he is legitimised to treat as he finds proper. In this sense, despite the fact that she has the social status of a "free" woman,

Mary gets no better treatment than the family servants, as the example of her female servant demonstrates. The maid says to Nikephoros, who threatens to kill her if she does not reveal the name of his wife's assumed lover: "My lord, this day you hold in your hands my life and death, and I will suffer anything you wish" (tr. Laiou 1996: 264; ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ὁ θάνατός μου ἐν ταῖς χερσὶ σου ἐστὶ, κύριέ μου, σήμερον, καὶ πρὸς τὸ παθεῖν ἔγκειμαι πᾶν ὅ,τι καὶ βούλοιο. *VMarIun* ch.8). Considering themselves the masters of their wives, the central heroines' husbands thus feel obliged to punish them for not behaving as they should. Through punishment, they aim to force their wives to return to their traditional place, the one they should possess as women.

The punishment imposed on Matrona, Anastasia and Mary the Younger is enclosure. They are shut up at home by their husbands. The imprisonment of Matrona lasts only for a few days. She manages to get out of her prison by convincing her husband to let her visit the church. After her release Matrona never returns home. Nevertheless Matrona cannot exist as a woman anymore. She has to become a man and enter the world of male monastics in order to escape her husband.

The imprisonment of Anastasia and Mary the Younger separates the two women from their husbands, who now behave as if they have no wives. Nikephoros, for instance, does not even ask Mary to eat with him and their relatives on the Sunday of the Great Lent, a day on which Christian families gather around the table (*VMarIun* ch.9). Unlike Matrona's imprisonment, those of Anastasia and Mary function not only as a means of exclusion but also as a death machine. Anastasia is deprived of food because Pouplios wants her to die. He even threatens to punish her guards if he finds her alive after he comes back from his trip to Persia (*PAnastRom* ch.6). In the end Anastasia does not die because her husband dies before her and her guards release her.

Mary the Younger, on the other hand, dies in her imprisonment. In a prolepsis after the presentation of Mary's God-pleasing way of living, the hagiographer prepares the listener or reader of the text for the approaching end of her earthly life. The prolepsis reads as follows:

While she was living in this manner, and was praised by all, he who sought the surrender first of Job and then of Peter, he [Satan] who watches against our heel (Gen. 3.16), and who, above all, watches for the end of our life's journey, tried also, it seems, the blessed woman and sought to upset her God-fearing life, to divert her steps and to disturb her straight path. He

finally brought such a trial upon this most revered of women, that she ended her life through it, and was translated to eternal life. (tr. Laiou 1996: 262)

Ταύτης μὲν τῆς οὕτω βιούσης τὸν τρόπον καὶ οὕτω παρὰ πάντων ἐπαινουμένης, ὁ τὸν Ἰῶβ μὲν πρότερον, τὸν δὲ Πέτρον ἐξαιτησάμενος ὕστερον, ὁ τὴν ἡμετέραν πτέρναν τηρῶν καὶ τῆς ἐν βίῳ πορείας τὸ τέλος ἐπιτηρῶν μάλιστα, ἐξαιτεῖται καὶ τὴν μακαρίαν, ὡς ἔοικε, καὶ ζητεῖ τὴν κατὰ Θεὸν αὐτῆς πολιτείαν ὑποσκελίσαι καὶ περιτρέψαι τὰ διαβήματα καὶ τὴν κατευθυνομένην ταράξαι τρίβον. Καὶ δὴ τοιοῦτόν τινα τελευταῖον πειρασμὸν τῇ σεμνοτάτῃ γυναικῶν ἐπιφέρει, ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ τὸν βίον καταλύει καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἀγήρω ζωὴν μετατίθεται. (*VMarIun* ch.7)

The incidents narrated after the above quoted prolepsis are directed towards the realisation of its content. Everything that occurs and every new person appearing in the narrative serves the same purpose: to bury Mary alive so that she will really die. The actions undertaken by Nikephoros against Mary become progressively more cruel, and as they follow a climactic development through the progress of the narrative, they bring the heroine closer to death until the moment that it actually occurs. As the narrative progresses, the length of Mary's earthly life diminishes more and more.

Nikephoros' first move against Mary is to show her that he does not trust her by arranging for guards to be placed outside her room. Through this act Nikephoros transforms Mary's own room into a prison (*VMarIun* ch.8). He then causes her distress by ordering the violent beating of her maid. The cruelty of Nikephoros as manifested in her maid's bodily punishment horrifies Mary, who sees Nikephoros' behaviour as a sign of the devil's rage against her. For this reason she sends messages to the nuns and monks she helped in the past, asking for their blessing (*VMarIun* ch.8). This is the first and last communication with friendly people from the outside world that Mary has after her forced restriction to her room and it appears just before her death. It is only on her deathbed that Mary again has the opportunity to be in touch with people who respect her and do not seek her destruction. Distinguished women of Vizye enter her room (coming from the outside) and in doing so transform Mary's private death scene into a public one. The scene in which Mary's last moments are depicted combines in an interesting way the double character of her life: its private and public side.

Nikephoros' third action against Mary is to hire two people: a man and a female slave. The task of the first is to watch Mary carefully and

that of the latter to supervise the storeroom. Both of them are ordered to "cause every sort of distress to the blessed woman, not allowing her to take anything if she so desired, nor giving her anything if she asked" (tr. Laiou 1996: 264; πάντα τρόπον λυπεῖν τὴν μακαρίαν ἐκέλευσε, κἂν λαβεῖν τι βούλοιοτο, μὴ ἐφίεναι, κἂν αἰτήσοιτο, μὴ διδόναι. *VMarIun* ch.8). The space that Mary now inhabits becomes even more limited, as her rights are limited. Her guardians were previously outside her room but now they are allowed to come inside in order to control her movements and cause her distress. Mary is now completely displaced: not only is her geographical space diminished but she has also lost her place as the respected lady of the house. Now she is not permitted to ask for the service of her slaves, and worse, she is under the authority of individuals who are socially inferior to her. Under these conditions Mary suffers both psychologically and physically:

To these griefs was added sickness of the body, and her stomach illness, from which she suffered greatly and constantly, worsened. She endured pains and nausea, and when the time of her death came near, she was suffering from her stomach disease. Then something else happened as well. (tr. Laiou 1996: 264)

Τούτοις τοῖς λυπηροῖς καὶ ἀρρωστίᾳ προσετέθη τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἡ σύντροφος τοῦ στομάχου ἐπετάθη ἀσθένεια, ὅφ' ἥς μάλιστα καὶ συνεχῶς κακῶς ἔπασχεν, ὀδύνας τε καὶ ἀηδίας ὑφίστατο· καὶ ὅτε δὲ ὁ τῆς ἐκδημίας ἐπέστη καιρὸς, τοῖς τοῦ στομάχου κακοῖς ἐτρύχετο· συνέπεσε δὲ τῇνικαῦτα καὶ τι τοιοῦτον. (*VMarIun* ch.8)

Nikephoros' last and fatal movement against Mary, and also the most aggressive, is incited by the words of a man who aims at provoking Nikephoros' anger against her.

He said, "Your wife does not regard you as a Christian, nor does she think that you can have any good hope [of salvation], as long as you are not reconciled to her; rather she openly calls you Satan, the one who from the beginning was a killer of mankind and an enemy of God." When [Nikephoros] heard these things, he was roused against her. [...] He [...] entered her bedroom [...] and saw the blessed woman lying on the bed, holding her baby in her arms. Grabbing her by the hair, he dragged her and beat her mercilessly. [...] She, having escaped from his hands and rushing toward another part of the house, stumbled and tripped over her feet and injured her head. Thus, with the conjunction of three causes, her illness and her sorrow and her wounds, she became feverish, and took to her bed. (tr. Laiou 1996: 265)

“Ἡ σύζυγος γὰρ (φησὶν) οὐδὲ χριστιανὸν εἶναί σε τίθεται οὐδὲ χρηστὰς ἔχειν ἐλπίδας, αὐτῇ μὴ καταλλαττόμενον, ἀλλὰ Σατανᾶν ἄντικρυς ὀνομάζει, τὸν ἅπ’ ἄρχῃς ἀνθρωποκτόνον καὶ Θεῷ ἀντικείμενον.” Ταῦτα ἐκεῖνος ὡς ἤκουσεν, ἐκινήθη μὲν κατ’ αὐτῆς [...] εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν κοιτῶνα αὐτῆς [...] ὁρᾷ τὴν μακαρίαν ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης κειμένην καὶ βρέφος ἐν ταῖς ἀγκάλαις φέρουσαν, καὶ τῆς κόμης αὐτῆς δραξάμενος εἴλκε καὶ ἔτυπτεν ἀφειδῶς. [...] Αὕτη δὲ τὰς χεῖρας ἐκείνου διαφυγοῦσα καὶ πρὸς μέρος τι τῆς οἰκίας μεταβαίνειν ὀρμήσασα προσπταίει τοὺς πόδας καὶ συμποδίζεται καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τραυματίζεται. Τριῶν δὲ αἰτιῶν συνδραμόντων, ἀσθενείας καὶ λύπης καὶ πληγῆς, παρὰ φύσιν θερμαίνεται καὶ τῇ κλίνῃ ἐαυτὴν δίδωσι. (*VMarlun* chs.9–10)

The incident quoted above demonstrates that in addition to the control of Mary’s movements her speech is also under surveillance. Mary’s existence is made insufferable. First her space is reduced, then her movements within it are limited and finally speech is taken away from her. She cannot express herself; her words are falsified for her own destruction. Her actual death is near; Nikephoros replies to her falsely reported words with murderous violence.

Mary’s anonymous male enemy alters her words but in reality he says the truth about Nikephoros. His presentation as Satan and killer lies in accordance with the way he is portrayed in the narrative and the role he plays in it: he is the one who effectively leads Mary to death and proves true the above quoted prolepsis, according to which Mary’s killer is Satan.

In her philosophical work Irigaray suggests the creation of a world in which the “polemical form of the master-slave relationship” between man and woman does not exist (Irigaray 1993: 17). Such a world can come into being only if the two sexes encounter each other through recognising and accepting each other’s alterity and independence. The *Life of Mary the Younger* is the only text of the ones examined in this chapter in which the conflict between the heroine and her husband ends. However, this occurs when Mary is about to die.

As the illness became mightier, she sent her husband this message: “If, my lord, you want to see my miserable self still alive, come, and we will see each other.” When he came, she said, “I am now departing, and the Lord has manifested this to me in my sleep, for He sent my two children who grasped my hands and promised to lead me to the King [of all] Who was calling me.” Upon hearing this, he began to cry, and she spoke again, saying, “Lo, I am dying of this illness as the Lord has ordained, and I am

going to our common master. As for you, even if you did not believe me before, do so now, for I speak the truth. You were badly misled by my slanderers and accepted an empty rumour. The Lord is my witness, into Whose hands I shall deliver my soul; I do not know that evil word; I was questioned about things of which I had no knowledge; expel the unworthy suspicion from your heart, and fare well and keep safe with our children.” [...] Only then did he recognise the virtue of his wife, and he blamed himself, and blamed those who had accused her, for they had sinned and had made him partner in their crime by deceiving him; he called them wretched, and himself more so. (tr. Laiou 1996: 265–267)

τῆς νόσου κραταιωθείσης, τάδε δηλοῖ τῷ ἀνδρί· “Εἰ βούλει, κύριέ μου, ζώσαν ἔτι με τὴν ἀθλίαν ἰδεῖν, ἐλθε καὶ ἀλλήλους ὀφόμεθα.” Ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ ἦλθεν· “Ἐγὼ μὲν ἦδη ἐκλείπω, (φησὶν πρὸς αὐτόν), καὶ τοῦτο δεδηλώκέ μοι καθ’ ὕπνου ὁ κύριος, τὰ δύο μοι πέμψας παιδία ἑκατέρας χειρὸς λαμβανόμενα καὶ πρὸς τὸν καλοῦντα βασιλέα χειραγωγεῖν ὑπισχνούμενα.” Ὁ δὲ ταῦτα ἀκούων κλαίειν ἐπέβαλε, κάκεῖνη τὸν λόγον πάλιν ἀναλαβοῦσα· “Ἰδοὺ (φησὶν) ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ ἔδοξεν, ἐν τῇ νόσῳ ταύτῃ τελειοῦμαι καὶ πρὸς τὸν κοινὸν δεσπότην μεθίσταμαι· σὺ δὲ εἰ καὶ μὴ πρότερον, ἀλλὰ νῦν γοῦν δέξαι τὰ ἐμαυτῆς, ἀληθῶς ταῦτα ἀπαγγελλούσης μου. Οὐ καλῶς ὑπὸ τῶν συκοφαντούντων με παρηνέχθης καὶ ἀκοὴν παρεδέξω ματαίαν. Μάρτυς μου κύριος, οὗ εἰς χεῖρας τὴν ψυχὴν παραθήσομαι· οὐκ οἶδα τὸ πονηρὸν ἐκεῖνο ῥῆμα· ἃ οὐκ ἔγνων ἡρωτήθην· ἔξελε τῆς καρδίας τὴν φαύλην ὑπόνοιαν καὶ χαῖρε καὶ σῶζου μετὰ τῶν τέκνων.” [...] Τότε μόλις τὴν ἀρετὴν τῆς συζύγου ἐκεῖνος ἐμάνθανε καὶ κατεγίνωσκε μὲν ἑαυτοῦ, κατεγίνωσκε δὲ τῶν κατειπόντων ἐκείνης, ὡς αὐτῶν τε ἁμαρτόντων, ἀπατησάντων δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ κοινωνὸν ποιησαμένων τοῦ κρίματος, καὶ ἀθλίους μὲν ἐκείνους ἐκάλει, ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἀθλιώτερον. (*VMarlun* chs.10–11)

There are three scenes in which Mary and Nikephoros are presented alone in the same room. All of these scenes are associated with the relation between the heroine and her husband. The first scene, which takes the form of a trial, introduces their conflict into the narrative. Nikephoros calls Mary in private in order to tell her that she has been accused of adultery and of plundering the household. Despite the fact that Mary is given the right to speak and defend herself, her words are not taken into consideration. It is as if she had never spoken. Being resolved to punish her, Nikephoros appears to be uninterested in his wife’s innocence or guilt. During the second scene, which takes place when Nikephoros enters Mary’s room and beats her, there are no words only action. This time Nikephoros does not inform Mary that he

wants to see her. He arrives unexpectedly in her room and grabs her by the hair at a moment when Mary cannot see him. The third scene is that of the couple's reconciliation quoted above. In contrast to the first two scenes in which the dominant role is played out by Nikephoros, in the third scene the roles have changed. Mary is the one who assumes the dominant role. Now she calls Nikephoros to come and see her. The only speaker in this scene is Mary, whereas Nikephoros assumes the role of the listener. Instead of talking he cries. This is the only time when Nikephoros listens to Mary, who repeats her innocence. It is only now that Nikephoros sees Mary's virtues which he could not see before, but it is already too late, since Mary is about to die.

The deaths of Thomaïs and Mary the Younger, caused by their domestic sufferings, mark the beginning of their afterlives in which the space of domestic violence is substituted by the eternal space of holiness. In the following section, the two heroines' afterlives will be examined.

Saintly Afterlife: The Place of the Holy Wife

The term "afterlife" signifies the part of the narrative which follows the holy wife's earthly death and relates the events occurring after her death. These events concern the burial, the translation and the general treatment of the holy wife's dead body, her posthumous miracles and the reactions of some persons of the narrative to these miracles. The Lives of holy wives which contain afterlives are those of Thomaïs and Mary the Younger, who perform only the role of the holy wife. As we shall see, the authors of these two texts attempt to establish the heroines' holiness rather through their afterlives than through their lay lives, which are not considered holy enough.

The other texts examined in this chapter, the Lives of Matrona and Anastasia, do not have afterlives because they are less polemical; they do not clash with the dominant ideologies about the roads leading to holiness. Neither Matrona nor Anastasia remain wives until the end of their lives but they also undertake established roles of female holiness, those of the cross-dressing monk, the solitary, the abbess (Matrona) and the martyr (Anastasia). The Lives of Thomaïs and Mary the Younger, on the contrary, are unconventional.

In most of the Lives of holy women written before those of Thomaïs and Mary the Younger, the end of the narrative is marked by the

end of the heroines' earthly lives. As for the female Lives which do not end almost immediately after the scenes of the central heroines' deaths and burials, they frequently contain short accounts of the holy women's posthumous miracles.⁹ Thomaïs' afterlife, on the contrary, takes up almost half the narrative space that her life covers. The afterlife of Thomaïs consists mainly of her posthumous miracles. A central issue raised in her afterlife is the place where her dead body should be buried. This is a matter that preoccupies the heroine herself during her life-time:

While still alive she had commanded those she lived with not to place her [body] inside the holy church, but outside it in the forecourts until the all-compassionate God might desire to work miracles through His grace and show where she should be laid. [...] For she spoke as follows: "When my spirit departs from its present dwelling, I command all of you not to bury this earthly body inside the divine church, but in the forecourt," as has [already] been said "until divine providence should work miracles about me." [...] When the holy nuns who resided at the convent saw the wondrous miracle and recalled the words of the blessed [Thomaïs], they marvelled at her foresight and placed the remains of the saint in the divine church with befitting honour, thus carrying out her instructions. (tr. Halsall 1996: 316–317)

ζῶσα δὲ ἔτι παρεγγυᾶται τοῖς συνοῦσιν αὐτῇ μὴ θελῆσαι θεῖναι ταύτην ἐντὸς τοῦ θείου σηκοῦ, ἀλλ' ἐξωθεν περὶ τὰ προαύλια, ἄχρις ἂν αὐτὸς ὁ πανοικτίρμων Θεὸς ἐθέλῃ τερατουργῆσαι διὰ τῆς αὐτοῦ χάριτος καὶ δεῖξαι, ποῦ ἄρα χρεὼν κεῖσθαι αὐτήν. [...] ἔφασκε γὰρ οὕτως· "Ἐπὰν ἐκ τοῦ παρόντος σκήνους ἐξέλθῃ τὸ πνεῦμά μου, παρεγγυῶμαι πᾶσιν ὑμῖν μὴ θελῆσαι καταθεῖναι τὸ γεῶδες τοῦτο σωματίον τοῦ θείου ναοῦ ἐνδοθεν, ἀλλ' ἐν τοῖς προαυλίοις, ὡς εἴρηται, ἄχρις ἂν ἡ θεία πρόνοια περὶ ἐμὲ τερατουργῇ θαυμάσια." [...] αἱ γοῦν τῷ σεμνεῖ προσμένουσαι γυναῖκες, σεμναὶ τὸν μοναχικὸν μετιοῦσαι βίον, τὸ παράδοξον ἰδοῦσαι τοῦ θαύματος καὶ τοῦ ῥήματος ἀναμνησθεῖσαι τῆς μακαρίας καὶ τὴν πρόρρησιν ταύτης θαυμάσασαι μετὰ τῆς προσηκούσης τιμῆς τῷ θεῷ σηκῷ τὸ τῆς ἀγίας λείψανον ἐμβιδάζουσι καὶ τέλος διδόασιν τῷ ταύτης παραγγέλματι. (*VThomaïs* chs.16–17)

During her lifetime, Thomaïs visits on a daily basis innumerable churches in which she spends considerable time. As stated earlier, she considers the house of God as her real home and not that of her husband, which con-

⁹ The only exceptions are the Lives of the following four holy women: Theodora of Thessalonike, Athanasia of Aegina, Martha, mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger, and Euphrosyne the Younger. The posthumous miracles of these women occupy a considerable narrative space.

stitutes a space of violence and abuse. In God's house Thomaïs acquires an importance and an honorary position, which she is deprived of in her husband's house where she is forced to live. While in a church Thomaïs is sanctified through her performing of miracles. People suffering from illnesses arrive to see her and ask her to heal them. A church becomes the dwelling of Thomaïs' body also in her afterlife. This occurs after the performance of a miracle at her tomb, which is initially situated outside the church of the convent where her mother Kale was abbess. The geographical spaces of the outside and the inside thus play an important role not only during Thomaïs' life, but also during her afterlife.

As for Mary the Younger, her case is more or less unique, in that her afterlife occupies more narrative space than her life.¹⁰ Unlike that of Thomaïs, Mary's afterlife includes not only posthumous miracles but also a long scene depicting the preparation of Mary's burial (*VMarIun* ch.11), her funeral (*VMarIun* ch.11) and the double translation of her relics. Mary's first grave seems to be not far away from the episcopal church of Vizye, since the heroine's first posthumous miracle is witnessed by the people participating in a Sunday service (*VMarIun* ch.12). The heroine's relics are transferred into a church built by her husband especially for this purpose after she has appeared to him in his sleep asking him to undertake this task (*VMarIun* ch.17). The second translation of Mary's relics takes place when her twin sons decide to transform her church into a monastery (*VMarIun* ch.27). The translation of Mary's relics first to a church and later to a monastery constitutes part of a strategy which aims at the establishment of her cult. The translation of Thomaïs' relics from the outside of a church to its inside serves the same purpose.

The lives of Thomaïs and Mary the Younger are less emphasised by their hagiographers than the lives of holy women who enact traditional roles of sainthood, exactly because they lie outside the saintly norm. The lives of Thomaïs and Mary the Younger are not as extraordinary and "saintly" as those of the individuals who renounce the life in the world.¹¹

¹⁰ In the Life of another female lay saint, which is not discussed in this study, Martha, the mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger, the same occurs. The Life of Mary the Younger appears to have many parallels with Martha's Life.

¹¹ The holiness of Theodora of Thessalonike, who spends a large part of her life in the world, is also questioned by some monks who appear in her Life (*VTheodThess* ch.59.9–15).

Archbishop Euthymios in the Life of Mary the Younger, who at the beginning appears to believe that holiness can be achieved only by monks but later seems to change his opinion after witnessing Mary's miracles, formulates it as follows:

For [...] we know this woman to have been good, and her life to have been virtuous; but we cannot believe that she has been found worthy of such grace. God has granted the ability to perform miracles to chaste men, holy monks, and martyrs. She, on the other hand, lived with a man, and did not change her mode of life, nor did she ever do any great or extraordinary things. Whence her power to perform miracles? (tr. Laiou 1996: 268)

ἡμεῖς γὰρ [...] καλὴν μὲν καὶ ἀγαθὴν τὴν γυναῖκα εἶναι ὁμολογοῦμεν καὶ τὸν βίον αὐτῆς σεμνὸν οἶδαμεν· τοιαύτης μὲντοι χάριτος ἀξιωθῆναι αὐτὴν οὐ πιστεύομεν. Τὴν γὰρ θαυμάτων ἐνέργειαν ἀγνοῖς ἀνδράσι καὶ μοναχοῖς ἀγίοις καὶ μάρτυσιν ὁ Θεὸς ἐφιλοτιμήσατο· αὕτη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρὶ συνώκει καὶ τῆς ἐν τῷ βίῳ ἀναστροφῆς οὐκ ἐξέστη οὐδέ τι τῶν ὑπερφυῶν καὶ μεγάλων εἰργάσατο. Πόθεν οὖν αὐτῇ τὸ θαυματουργεῖν; (*VMarIun* ch.12)

Euthymios expresses his doubts about Mary's holiness when, a few weeks after the heroine's burial, her first miracle, the healing of a man possessed by a demon, is about to occur. The story of Mary's first miracle is remarkable in many respects: its length—it is the longest miracle story of the text—, its content and structure, but also for the issues it raises. In contrast to Mary's other posthumous healing miracles and those of other Lives, in this particular miracle the person seeking a cure from Mary is mistreated by other characters in the narrative. When a stranger possessed by a demon arrives at Vizye and comes to the church of the town shouting the holy woman's name, he is summoned by the aforementioned Euthymios. The passage quoted above is part of Euthymios' talk during his meeting with the possessed man. Euthymios does not believe that the man is really possessed but that he is just acting as possessed after having been asked by Mary's family. He threatens to punish the man if he goes on pretending to be a possessed person who will be cured by Mary. Euthymios' threat is carried out by Nikephoros, Mary's husband, who takes the man and tortures him. Nikephoros appears

Her afterlife, covering a considerable part of the narrative, as mentioned above, constitutes a large account of her posthumous miracles. Also in her case, the long afterlife aims at establishing her sanctity and cult.

to have the same opinion as Euthymios, namely that the man, having been prompted by Mary's relatives, is pretending to be possessed.

After being dismissed by Nikephoros, the possessed man is repeatedly driven by the demon to Mary's grave without being granted a cure. The heroine delays the performing of her miracle and in doing so she prolongs the man's sufferings for many days, until a Sunday comes when almost the entire city (*VMarIun* ch.12) is gathered in the church. When the prayers finish and the faithful come out of the church, the possessed man appears. He approaches Mary's tomb but his cure is postponed until the heroine's gravestone has been removed, her coffin has been opened and her right hand has been brought to the man's lips. The repeated postponements of the possessed man's healing until it can be witnessed by almost all the inhabitants of Vizye, in addition to the doubts about Mary's holiness as expressed by both the archbishop and Nikephoros, demonstrate that Mary's first miracle aims at the establishment of her holiness and cult.

Unlike the posthumous healing miracles of other holy women of Byzantine Lives performed at their tombs, this and other miracles of Mary are performed directly above her dead body, which emits not only a sweet smell (as is often the case with the holy bodies in saints' Lives), but also blood. The vivacity of Mary's body, which is repeatedly emphasised, constitutes a central characteristic of her afterlife. By stressing to such a high degree the vivacity of the dead Mary, her hagiographer aims at presenting her afterlife as even more lively and real than her actual life. In other words, Mary's hagiographer seems to suggest that one should consider Mary's miraculous afterlife and not her life in order to see her holiness, which, according to Euthymios, due to its secular quality prevents the heroine from having a share in the divine.

Mary's first miracle is quite ambivalent. While, on one hand, it seems to have as its purpose the establishment of Mary's sainthood which is called into question by some characters in the narrative, on the other, its character appears to cancel the very holiness it aims at establishing. In fact, neither Mary's first nor her following miracles seem to secure her holiness, which is repeatedly disbelieved by many characters in the narrative: Christians and non-Christians, churchmen, monks and laymen. Thus instead of establishing Mary's sanctity, this first miracle puts it into question:

Thereupon some monks, moved not by zeal but by envy at the miracles, said, "It is not possible for someone who lives a secular life, eats meat, and enjoys the pleasures of marriage to receive from God the grace of working miracles, while monks, who deprive themselves of every pleasure, who are mortified and distressed in everything, who, on top of that, devote themselves to singing hymns day and night, are not deemed worthy of such grace." Thus, they spoke, not knowing that when one accomplishes fully what he has promised, he is worthy of this gift. But he who has not carried out [his promises] not only loses the bounty but also makes himself subject to condemnation inasmuch as he has deceived the person to whom he made the promise. The blessed Mary, the wonder of our generation, preserved unadulterated to the end the promise she made at the moment of holy baptism. That was perfection in things secular, to which she added virtues of many other kinds, among them charity which exalts man more than any other virtue, being the fruit of love that so pleases God that He Himself wishes to be called by the name of Love. (tr. Laiou 1996: 273)

Ἐντεῦθεν μοναχοὶ τινες, φθόνῳ μᾶλλον ἢ ζήλῳ νικώμενοι, ἐπὶ τοῖς τελουμένοις θαύμασιν ἔλεγον· "Οὐ δύναται τις ἐν κόσμῳ διάγων, κρεωφαγῶν τε καὶ ταῖς τῆς συζυγίας ἡδοναῖς ἐνηδόμενος, θαυματουργίας παρὰ Θεοῦ χάρισμα δεῖξασθαι, τῶν μοναχῶν στερουμένων πάντων ἡδέων καὶ κακουμένων καὶ θλιβομένων ἐν ἅπασι, πρὸς δὲ καὶ νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ὕμνοις προσκαρτερούντων καὶ μὴ ἀξιουμένων τινὸς τοιοῦτου χαρίσματος." Ταῦτα δὲ ἔλεγον μὴ εἰδότες ὡς ὁ ἐπηγγεῖλατό τις εἰς τέλος ἀνύσας τῆς ἐπ' αὐτῷ δωρεᾶς ἄξιός ἐστιν· ὁ δὲ μὴ ἀνύσας, πρὸς τὸ ἐστερηθῆσαι τῆς δωρεᾶς καὶ κατακρίσεως αἴτιον ἑαυτὸν καθιστᾷ, ὡς ψευδάμενος εἰς τὸν πρὸς ὃν ἐπηγγεῖλατο. Αὕτη μὲν γὰρ ἡ μακαρία Μαρία, τὸ θαῦμα τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς γενεᾶς, ὅσον ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ βαπτίσματι ἐπηγγεῖλατο, διετήρησε μέχρι τέλους ἀνόθευτον, ὅπερ ἐστὶ πάντως τῆς τῶν κοσμικῶν τελειότητος· ἡ δὲ προσέθετο τούτῳ σὺν ἄλλαις οὐκ ὀλίγαις ἀρετῶν ἰδέαις καὶ τὴν ἐλεημοσύνην, ἥ πάντων τῶν ἀρετῶν μάλιστα τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀνυψοῖ, ὡς καρπὸς ὑπάρχουσα τῆς ἀγάπης, ἥ καὶ Θεὸς ἐπευφραίνεται μᾶλλον, καὶ αὐτὸς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἀγάπῃ ὀνομάζεσθαι βούλεται. (*VMarIun* ch.19)

Of course, each time a doubt concerning Mary's holiness is articulated, the hagiographer argues against it, as he does in the above quotation, or the persons who dared to express such a doubt are either punished and/or become witnesses of a new miracle, which makes them believe in Mary's sanctity. The discourses, which doubt Mary's sanctity by comparing her life to that of the monastics, constitute manifestations of established ideologies concerning the roads leading to holi-

ness and are, in their turn, attacked by the hagiographer. In the passage quoted above, the hagiographer does not fail to uncover the unsaintly lives of some monks, who, even though they claim to be without worldly cares, are more worldly than people like Mary, who actually *lived* in the world. Unlike these monks, Mary showed no envy in her life, for she was full of love and, more precisely, she was "the fruit of love" (ὡς καρπὸς ὑπάρχουσα τῆς ἀγάπης, *VMarIun* ch.19).

Mary's hagiographer includes in his text discourses against the heroine's holiness in order to make the audience of his text conscious about the real essence of sainthood. The theory of Mary's hagiographer about the essence of real holiness is summarised in the above quotation: a real saint is an individual such as Mary who embodied love and who served God according to the mission she undertook during her life. It is accordingly not the *place* that makes the saint, so it does not matter whether one decides to live "inside or outside the world", lead a lay or a monastic life. As Mary's hagiographer notes in the prologue of the Life, obstacles to sanctity are:

Neither sex, nor fortune, nor weakness of the body, nor differences in station, nor anything else [...] all sexes, offices, ages, and walks of life are called to this good fight. (tr. Laiou 1996: 254)

οὔτε γένος, οὔτε τύχη, οὔτε σώματος ἀσθένεια, οὔτε βίου διαίρεσις, οὐκ ἄλλο οὐδὲν [...] πᾶν γένος καὶ ἀξίωμα καὶ ἡλικία καὶ βίου εἶδη εἰς τὸν καλὸν τοῦτον ἀγῶνα κέκληται. (*VMarIun* ch.1)

The Life of Mary the Younger constitutes an answer to those who believe that a life in the world cannot lead to holiness. The hagiographer goes on to say in the prologue:

So also with the blessed Mary, the wonder of our generation, who is the subject of our discourse. Although she was a woman, although she was married and bore children, nothing hindered her in any way from finding favour with God: neither the weakness of [female] nature, nor the annoyances of wedlock, nor the needs and cares of child-rearing. To the contrary, it was these things which gave her the occasion to find favour [with God], and thus proved that those who believe and claim that such things form an obstacle to virtue are foolish and create *pretexts for sins* (Ps. 141.4; tr. Laiou 1996: 254)

Οὕτω καὶ τὴν μακαρίαν Μαρίαν, τὸ θαῦμα τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς γενεᾶς, ἣν ὁ λόγος ἡμῖν ὑπόθεσιν ἐνεστήσατο, καὶ γυναικα οὖσαν καὶ ἀνδρὶ συζευχθεῖσαν

καὶ τέκνα σχοῦσαν οὐδὲν οὐδαμοῦ διεκώλυσεν εὐδοκιμῆσαι παρὰ Θεῷ, οὐκ ἀσθένεια φύσεως, οὐ τὰ τοῦ γάμου δυσχερῆ, οὐ παιδοτροφίας ἀνάγκη καὶ μέριμνα, ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μᾶλλον καὶ ἀφορμὴν αὐτῇ ἔσχεν εὐδοκιμήσεως, καὶ ματαιάζοντας ἔδειξεν καὶ προφάσεις πλάττοντας ἐν ἀμαρτίαις τοὺς ταῦτά τε καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐμπόδιον πρὸς ἀρετὴν εἶναι λέγοντας καὶ νομίζοντας. (*VMarIun* ch.1)

The Life of Mary the Younger was produced in a period during which previous types of sainthood, such as the monk, the nun or the hermit, were called into question, either because they had ceased to incorporate the ideals they used to, or because Byzantine society had changed and had different ideologies. The criticism against monastic life reaches its peak in the twelfth century. Eustathios of Thessalonike, for instance, wrote an Enkomion of a lay saint, Philotheos of Opsikion (in Tafel 1832: 145–151). In the Enkomion of Philotheos, which parodies the life of the hermit, Eustathios suggests that secular life as led by Philotheos is more praiseworthy than the life of the hermit. The hermit seeks to save only himself and not others. His life in solitude is much easier than the life of someone who lives in a society and has to solve worldly problems (Kazhdan and Epstein 1985: 86–99; Magdalino 1981).

In the Lives of holy wives examined here, space plays a vital role both in the heroines' lives and in their afterlives. Space also appears to take various forms in these texts: it has both a physical and a metaphysical sense, both literal and metaphorical meanings. It alludes to the geographical locations the heroines inhabit: the places where they enact their domestic and religious performances and those where their dead bodies are placed. The heroines' mobility or immobility in space is not only related to their gender and religious identities but also to the character of their lives which take both a public and a private form. Their public lives are opposed to their private and hidden lives. In public they exercise religious power; they appear independent and free. At home, on the other hand, they are reduced to the status of a slave. Their husbands beat, humiliate and confine them. In some of the examined texts the heroines' afterlife also becomes an issue from a spatial viewpoint, as regards the place where their dead bodies should be deposited. Furthermore space refers to the heroines' emotional states during their mistreatment at the hands of their husbands. In these texts space also acquires the meanings of the profane and the sacred. In addition, the concept of

space also refers to the spatial dimension of the heroines' bodies: their inside and their outside. The heroines' bodies become the spaces where miracles are performed. Another aspect is the spatial dimension of the texts themselves, the reading of or listening to them, which exposes the faithful to the space of the holy and the divine.

Conclusion

In the present study, I set out to approach the Byzantine female Life and examine some of its characteristics, conventions and codes. Like all literary genres and subgenres changing according to historical, social, cultural and political circumstances, the female Life was also subject to change, attested by its internal subdivisions, the female roles of sanctity. Between the fourth and the fourteenth centuries, the chronological limits framing the production of the Lives studied here, there were periods when only certain roles of female holiness are represented. Some roles appear and flourish in specific periods but disappear in others. Other roles appear in all periods, but not always with the same frequency. The holy penitent is a role depicted only in Lives written in Late Antiquity and in the early Byzantine period. The role of the cross-dresser, in some cases closely related to that of the penitent, flourished more or less in the same period. Only two holy cross-dressers appear in Lives of the middle and late Byzantine periods respectively (Life of Marina and Life of Euphrosyne the Younger), both with characteristics differentiating them from earlier cross-dressers. The role of the hermit, which is undertaken most often by penitents or cross-dressers, is also depicted mainly in the Lives of Late Antiquity and the early Byzantine period. The roles of the abbess and the nun are found in Lives composed in Late Antiquity and in the early and middle Byzantine periods. The role of the pious wife appears in a text of the sixth century (Life of Matrona), only to disappear immediately afterwards. It reappears much later in a few texts dating from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries.

Key elements in the literary construction of all these roles of female holiness are the body and its performances. Each role of sanctity is enacted through the heroine's bodily performances and is defined according to the ways in which her body appears, behaves and is being treated. A martyr is recognised by a young, naked, virginal, extremely beautiful, sexually connoted and unchanged body. A holy penitent's body is transformed from being beautiful and feminine into being ugly and male-like. The beauty and femininity of a cross-dresser are hidden under a monk's

cassock and effaced through strict abstinence; her body too becomes male-like. A nun has a young, beautiful and obedient body. An abbess is slightly older; she possesses a transparent body whose surface reflects her inner qualities and her body belongs rather to the world of the dead than to that of the living. The holy wife's body is not young, not old, neither extremely beautiful, nor ugly; it is a "normal" female body.

In order to offer edification and pious entertainment, the bodies of holy women are displayed in different contexts and spaces—in the pagan and the Christian world, in public and in private, in solitude and in the male or female monastery—as objects of sexually charged tortures, penance, discipline, punishment, correction and teaching. The martyr's and the holy wife's bodies are used as a means to express male violence, but there is a main difference between the forms of violence directed against a martyr and a holy wife. In the first case the violence is public, in the second it is private. Both the martyr and the pious wife find ways of escaping the total control that male authorities impose on them and on their bodies. The martyr exercises control over her own body through the practice of virginity, whereas the holy wife achieves the same through her public activities. A nun's body and its behaviour are also under the control of an authority but a female one, the abbess, who, unlike the pagan emperor or prefect and the "villain" husband, seeks the nun's spiritual improvement and not her destruction. A penitent's repentance, enacted through her body, and her ensuing salvation are guided by male authority, but in contrast to the nun, the penitent's religious life in solitude is not led under surveillance. The life of the cenobitic cross-dresser is also subjected to the surveillance and control of a male authority, the abbot. Like the martyr, the pious wife and the nun, the cenobitic cross-dresser who is accused of fathering a child also undergoes bodily punishment. As for the abbess, she is not left with more freedom than the women performing other roles of holiness, as far as the treatment of her body is concerned; she must treat her body in a way that proves it exemplary and instructive to her nuns.

Despite the differences in bodily manifestation and performance appearing in each role of female sanctity, we may draw some general conclusions concerning the literary construction of the female holy body and its features. Firstly, the religious performances of a body are always the results of someone else's involvement in a holy woman's life. The martyr's tortured body is the result of the persecutions against Christians

realised by pagan authorities. A harlot's penitence appears to be guided by a pious man or a divine voice. A heroine often cross-dresses and enters a male monastery in order to escape the control of her husband or father. A nun's asceticism would not be possible without the presence of an abbess and vice-versa. The sufferings of a pious wife could not occur without the existence of a non-pious husband.

Secondly, the female body is a desirable visual object both for the fictional male characters and for the factual readers or listeners who may identify with the "heroes" of the narrative. Desiring the bodily beauty of the martyr, which he cannot have, the pagan torturer forces her to provide him and his people with a bodily performance offering voyeuristic pleasure. The *mise-en-scène* of a holy prostitute's beauty is gazed at with desire by both laymen (desire for sexual intercourse) and churchmen (desire for spiritual elevation). The pious monk who encounters the holy penitent whose beauty has faded away desires her presence and the story of her sinful body. The cenobitic cross-dresser's bodily performances provide her fellow monks with pious examples for imitation. The body of the nun is the object of the abbess' gaze. The nuns and the visitors of a nunnery desire the sight of the abbess' exemplary body and her edifying discourse. The characters of a pious wife's Life desire to see and touch her incorruptible body which, while dead, still appears to possess life.

In order to define the female holy body accurately, we may call it sublime. The concept of the "sublime body", here employed to describe the body of the martyr, applies also to the bodies of the holy women enacting the other roles of sainthood. Through their repetitive religious performances during which the body's physical nature is suppressed and violated, the holy women acquire a new body which has a sublime nature. This second body is of an unalterable, incorruptible and indestructible substance, manifesting a universe beyond natural laws. The sublime nature of the holy woman's body is demonstrated differently in each role of female sainthood. In the martyr's case, her body does not experience pain despite the horrendous tortures inflicted upon it. Through her physical body, which is cut into pieces, emerges a whole and healthy body. The holy penitent acquires a body that has no sexual desires. Her new body can levitate and she can walk on water. During the cross-dresser's life, the female nature of her body becomes invisible. The nun's body is not harmed when the devil, taking the form of a person, for

instance, causes her to fall into a deep ditch. The abbess obtains a lifeless body, which has the same characteristics as a statue. The sublime nature of the pious wife's body becomes obvious mainly during her after-life as her dead body appears whole and unchanged.

The representations of holy women's bodies as sublime had a specific function, namely to produce knowledge. These Passions and Lives provided the medieval audience with religious information and offered examples of spirituality. According to the interpretation of the texts presented here, female spirituality is corporeal. The holy woman's body and soul form a unity; they cannot be separated from each other. This unity is reflected in the sublime body, which supports the doctrine of resurrection. The Byzantine Passions and Lives of holy women also offer us knowledge of Byzantine attitudes towards gender and the gendered body. The reading of these texts opens up for an understanding of the relationship between author and audience, men and women, past and present.

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List of Abbreviations

AASS	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i>
AB	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
AJS	<i>American Journal of Sociology</i>
AMG	<i>Annales du Musée Guimet</i>
BHG	<i>Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca</i> , Halkin 1957
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EO	<i>Échos d'Orient</i>
GOrThR	<i>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
MS	<i>Monastic Studies</i>
ODB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i>
PAec	The Passion of Catherine, <i>BHG</i> 30, in: Viteau 1897: 5–23
PAGIrCh	The Passion of Agape, Irene and Chione, <i>BHG</i> 34, in: P. Franchi de' Cavalieri (ed.) 1902. "Nuove note agiographiche", <i>ST</i> 9, 14–19
PAGn	The Passion of Agnes, <i>BHG</i> 46, in: P. Franchi de' Cavalieri (ed.) 1899. "S. Agnese nella tradizione et nella leggenda", <i>RQ</i> 10, 76–92
PAnastRom	The Passion of Anastasia of Rome, <i>BHG</i> 81–81a, in: Halkin 1973: 89–131
PAnastV	The Passion of Anastasia the Virgin, <i>BHG</i> 76z, in: Delehay 1936: 250–258

- PBar* The Passion of Barbara, *BHG* 213, in: Viteau 1897: 89–99
- PCaec* The Passion of Cecilia, *BHG* 283, in: F. Halkin (ed.) 1987. *Six inédits d'hagiologie byzantine* [Subsidia Hagiographica 74]. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 89–113
- PChar* The Passion of Charitine, *BHG* 299z, in: F. Halkin (ed.) 1954. "Les actes inédits de Sainte Charitine martyre à Corycos en Sicilie", *AB* 72, 8–14
- PChr* The Passion of Christina, *BHG* 302, in: M. Norsa (ed.) 1912. "Martirio di Santa Christina nel cod. Messin. 29", *StItalFCI* 19, 316–327
- PEuph* The Passion of Euphemia, *BHG* 619d, in: F. Halkin (ed.) 1965. *Euphémie de Chalcedoine: légendes byzantines* [Subsidia Hagiographica 41]. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 13–33
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- PIr* The Passion of Irene, *BHG* 953, in: A. Wirth (ed.) 1892. *Danae in christlichen Legenden*. Vienna: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 116–148
- PLuc* The Passion of Lucy, *BHG* 995, in: Taibbi 1959: 50–70
- PMarAnt* The Passion of Marina of Antioch, *BHG* 1165, in: H. Usener (ed.) 1886. "Acta S. Marinae et S. Christophori", *Festschrift zur fünften Säcularfeier der Carl-Ruprechts-Universität zu Heidelberg*. Bonn: Universitäts-Buchdruckerei von Carl Georgi, 15–47
- PPar* The Passion of Paraskeve, *BHG* 1420p, in: Halkin 1966: 231–237
- PPer* The Passion of Perpetua, *BHG* 1482, in: C. I. M. van Beek (ed.) 1936. *Passio sanctorum Perpetuae et Felicitatis: textum graecum et latinum ad fidem codicum Mss. Noviomagi*: Dekker and Van de Vegt S. A., 5–53
- PPh* The Passion of Photeine, *BHG* 1541, in: V. Latyšev (ed.) 1914. *Συλλογή παλαιστινής και συριακής αγιολογίας II, Pravoslavnyi Palestinskij Sbornik* 60, 1–26
- PPisElAg* The Passion of Pistis, Elpis and Agape, *BHG* 1637y, in: Halkin 1973: 185–204
- PSergBacch* The Passion of Sergios and Bakchos, *BHG* 1624, in: I. van den Gheyn (ed.) 1895. "Passio antiquior SS. Sergii et Bacchi", *AB* 14, 375–395
- PTat* The Passion of Tatiane, *BHG* 1699, in: Halkin 1973: 12–53

- PG* Patrologia Graeca
- RHR* Revue de l'Histoire des Religions
- RivStBizN* Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neellenici
- ROC* Revue de l'Orient Chrétien
- RQ* Römische Quartalschrift
- SM* Studi Medievali
- SO* Symbolae Osloensis
- ST* Studi e Testi
- StItalFCI* Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica
- VAndr* The Life of Andrew the Fool, *BHG* 115z, in: L. Rydén (ed.) 1995. *The Life of St. Andrew the Fool, II: Text, Translation and Notes* [Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 4:2]. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 12–302
- VAnt* The Life of Antony, *BHG* 140, in: G. J. M. Bartelink (ed.) 1994. *Athanase d'Alexandrie, Vie d'Antoine: introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index* [Sources Chrétiennes 400]. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 124–377
- VathAeg* The Life of Athanasia of Aegina, *BHG* 180, by: L. Carras, in: A. Moffatt (ed.) 1984. *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning* [Byzantina Australiensia 5]. Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 212–224
- VDom* The Life of Domnika, *BHG* 562, in: T. Ioannou (ed.) 1884. *Μνημεία αγιολογικά*. Venice, 268–284
- VELisThaum* The Life of Elisabeth the Wonderworker, *BHG* 2121, in: F. Halkin (ed.) 1973a. "Sainte Elisabeth d'Héraclée, abbesse à Constantinople", *AB* 91, 251–264
- VEud* The Life of Eudokia, *BHG* 604, *AASS* Mart. I. 1668: 875–883
- VEuphr* The Life of Euphrosyne, *BHG* 625, in: A. Boucherie (ed.) 1883. "Vita Sanctae Euphrosynae secundum textum graecum primaevum nunc primum edita", *AB* 2, 196–205
- VEuphrLun* The Life of Euphrosyne the Younger, *BHG* 627, *AASS* Nov. III. 1910: 861–877
- VEupr* The Life of Eupraxia, *BHG* 631, *AASS* Mart. II. 1668: 727–735
- VEusebX* The Life of Eusebia/Xene, *BHG* 633, in: T. Nissen (ed.) 1938. "S. Eusebiae seu Xenae Vita", *AB* 56, 106–111
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- VMacr* The Life of Macrina, *BHG* 1012, in: P. Maraval (ed.) 1971. *Grégoire de Nysse, Vie de Sainte Macrine: introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index* [Sources Chrétiennes 178]. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 136–267
- VMar* The Life of Mary, no *BHG* no., in: Richard 1975: 87–94
- VMarAeg* The Life of Mary of Egypt, *BHG* 1042, PG 87: 3697–3725
- VMarAnt* The Life of Mary of Antioch, *BHG* 1045, *AASS* Maii VII. 1688: 50–58
- VMarina* The Life of Marina, *BHG* 1170, in: Taibbi 1959: 80–106
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- VMartha* The Life of Martha, mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger, *BHG* 1174, *AASS* Maii V. 1685: 403–431
- VMatr* The Life of Matrona, *BHG* 1221, *AASS* Nov. III. 1910: 790–813
- VMel* The Life of Melania, *BHG* 1241, in: Gorce 1962: 124–270
- VMichMal* The Life of Michael Maleinos, *BHG* 1295, in: L. A. Petit (ed.) 1902. “Vie de Saint Michel Maléinos suivie du traité ascétique de Basile Maléinos”, *ROC* 7, 549–568
- VOl* The Life of Olympias, *BHG* 1374, in: A.-M. Malingrey (ed.) 1968. *Jean Chrysostome, Lettres à Olympias, Vie anonyme d'Olympias: introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* [Sources Chrétiennes 13]. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 406–448
- VPel* The Life of Pelagia, *BHG* 1478, in: Petitmengin et al. 1981: 77–93
- VSus* The Life of Susanna, *BHG* 1673, *AASS* Sept. VI. 1757: 153–159
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Index Locorum

A. Passions and Lives

The Passion of Catherine (*PAec*)
ch.7 **46, 52**

ch.12 **32**

ch.13 **32**

ch.14 **46**

ch.15 **47**

ch.19 **40**

ch.22 **32, 41**

ch.25 **48**

The Passion of Agape, Irene
and Chione (*PAGIrCh*)
ch.5.17–26 **33**

The Passion of Agnes (*PAGn*)

ch.7 **39**

ch.8 **37, 38**

ch.9 **38**

The Passion of Anastasia
of Rome (*PAnastRom*)
ch.2 **54**

ch.6 **179**

ch.16 **44**

ch.24 **51**

The Passion of Anastasia
the Virgin (*PAnastV*)
ch.8 **48n.9**

The Passion of Barbara (*PBar*)
p.95 **32**
p.97 **32**
p.99 **32**

The Passion of Cecilia (*PCaec*)
chs.3–5 **175**

The Passion of Charitine (*PChar*)
ch.7 **48n.9**

The Passion of Christina (*PChr*)
ch.14.2–4 **51**

ch.21.4–6 **52**

ch.30.1–6 **53**

ch.31.5–7 **48**

The Passion of Euphemia (*PEuph*)
ch.2 **20**

The Passion of Febronia (*PFeb*)
ch.4 **159**

ch.5 **152**

ch.6 **159**

ch.10 **153**

ch.17 **30**

ch.19 **158**

ch.27 **31**

The Passion of Irene (*PIr*)
p.137.687–688 **30**
p.144.925 **39**
p.146.971–974 **45**
p.147.1015–1019 **56**

The Passion of Lucy (*PLuc*)
ch.8.162–163 **41**

The Passion of Marina
of Antioch (*PMarAnt*)
p.19.14–20 **35**
p.19.22–23 **35**
p.20.1–4 **37**
p.20.27–36 **35**
p.21.13–18 **35**
p.21.27–30 **35**

p.22.5–7 **35**
 p.23.23–24 **35**
 p.23.26–27 **35**
 p.42.36–39 **56**
 p.43.17–30 **57**
 p.44.34–37 **57**
 p.44.9–15 **58**

The Passion of Paraskeve (*PPar*)
 ch.7 **47**
 ch. 8 **47**
 ch.10 **56**

The Passion of Photeine (*PPh*)
 ch.20.12–17 **50**
 ch.24.6–13 **41**

Passion of Pistis, Elpis and Agape
 (*PPisElAg*)
 ch.2 **46**
 ch.7 **40**
 ch.14 **43**

The Passion of Tatiane (*PTat*)
 ch.3 **52**
 ch.12 **52**

The Life of Andrew the Fool
 (*VAndr*)
 p.34.311–312 **141n.7**

The Life of Antony (*VAnt*)
 Proem, 1.7–13 **15**

The Life of Elisabeth
 the Wonderworker (*VElisThaum*)
 ch.1 **90**

The Life of Eudokia (*VEud*)
 ch.1 **67**
 ch.2 **79**

The Life of Euphrosyne (*VEuphr*)
 ch.4.31 **102**
 ch.6.24–25 **102**
 ch.7.10–11 **168**
 ch.8.18–21 **103**
 ch.8.25–26 **103**
 ch.8.27 **103**
 ch.9.1–3 **107**
 ch.9.3–5 **109**
 ch.9.35 **107**
 ch.12.23–27 **107**
 ch.14.6–7 **113**
 ch.16.28–31 **123**
 ch.17.2–5 **123**
 ch.17.6–7 **121**
 ch.17.7–9 **123**
 ch.18.13–18 **123**
 ch.19.23–26 **123**
 ch.19.26–30 **124**
 ch.21 **123**

The Life of Euphrosyne
 the Younger (*VEuphrIun*)
 ch.9 **91**
 ch.11 **114**
 ch.14 **111**
 ch.16 **117, 120**
 ch.17 **112**
 ch.28 **120**
 ch.29 **120**
 ch.30 **120**
 ch.31 **120**
 ch.34 **120**
 ch.35 **120**
 ch.36 **120**
 ch.49 **91**

The Life of Eupraxia (*VEupr*)
 ch.14 **156**
 ch.15 **157**
 ch.16 **157**
 ch.17 **157**

ch.20 **153**
 ch.21 **159**
 ch.22 **161**
 ch.23 **161**
 ch.24 **161**
 ch.25 **161**
 ch.26 **161**
 ch.27 **161**
 ch.30 **161**
 ch.31 **161**

The Life of Eusebia/Xene
 (*VEusebX*)
 ch.5 **92**
 ch.7.3–5 **92**
 ch.7.14 **92**

The Life of Euthymios
 the Younger (*VEuthymIun*)
 ch.7 **128**
 ch.8 **128**
 ch.9 **128**
 ch.12 **128**
 ch.27.27–28 **127**
 ch.32 **128**

The Life of Euthymios,
 Patriarch of Constantinople
 (*VEuthymPatr*)
 chs.6–7 **166**

The Life of Gregory
 of Dekapolis (*VGregDec*)
 Proem, 35 **14**
 Proem, 37–39 **14**

The Life of Irene
 of Chrysobalanton (*VIrChrys*)
 p.16.17–22 **15**
 p.16.20–23 **137**
 p.20.2–6 **157**
 p.24.5–9 **158**

p.24.12–17 **159**
 p.28.22–25 **135**
 p.30.1–2 **135**
 p.30.19–29 **135**
 p.32.1 **135**
 p.32.3–7 **136**
 p.32.19–23 **146**
 p.32.24–27 **148**
 p.34.3–14 **148**
 p.34.4–8 **149**
 p.34.23–30 **148**
 p.36.10–15 **148**
 p.38.18–22 **143**
 p.40.17–25 **143**
 p.44.14–27 **140**
 p.46.1–26 **140**
 p.48.1–9 **140**
 p.70.19–22 **141**
 p.74.21–25 **137**
 p.74.25–30 **137**
 p.76.5 **137**

The Life of Macrina (*VMacr*)
 ch.1.14–17 **90**
 ch.2.21–34 **15**
 ch.4.8–9 **67n.5**

The Life of Mary (*VMar*)
 ch.2.8–13 **102**
 ch.3.23–25 **102**
 ch.4.25 **109**
 ch.4.27–28 **109**
 ch.4.29–32 **103**
 ch.10.70–75 **117**
 ch.11.89–90 **115**
 ch.12.93–96 **116**
 ch.16.118–121 **116**
 ch.17.125–126 **116**
 chs.18–20.139–167 **125**
 ch.21.171–174 **126**

The Life of Mary of Egypt
(*VMarAeg*)

- ch.3 75
 ch.10 87
 ch.17 77
 ch.18 64, 65, 73, 77
 ch.19 62, 65
 ch.20 63, 77
 ch.21 78
 ch.22 82
 ch.23 83
 ch.24 82
 ch.27 85
 ch.28 65, 85
 ch.29 85
 ch.30 87
 ch.33 88
 ch.34 89
 ch.41 76, 77

The Life of Mary the Younger
(*VMarIun*)

- ch.1 190, 191
 ch.3 171
 ch.7 171, 178, 180
 ch.8 179, 180, 181
 ch.9 179, 182
 ch.10 182, 183
 ch.11 183, 186
 ch.12 186, 187, 188
 ch.17 186
 ch.19 189, 190
 ch.27 186

The Life of Matrona (*VMatr*)

- ch.4 101, 105, 107, 110, 113
 ch.5 105
 ch.6 113, 114
 ch.7 115
 ch.11 118
 ch.14 119, 165
 ch.51 119

The Life of Melania (*VMel*)

- ch.29 145
 ch.42 145
 ch.44 141n.8
 ch.48 145

The Life of Pelagia (*VPel*)

- ch.1.1–4 76
 chs.4–13.20–91 71
 ch.9.55–59 65
 ch.18.131 72
 ch.18.130–136 80
 ch.24.173–174 65
 chs.24–26.165–191 81
 ch.30.213–214 72
 ch.30.215–216 88
 ch.30.216–217 65
 ch.43.300–303 87
 ch.45.311–318 86
 ch.45.315–316 88
 ch.47.329–330 88
 ch.49.339–341 88
 ch.49.341–344 88
 ch.51.355–356 64

The Life of Susanna (*VSus*)

- ch.4 102, 110
 ch.5 112
 ch.9 102, 115

The Life of Synkletike (*VSyncl*)

- p.187.47–59 15

The Life of Taïsia (*VTaes*)

- p.86.1–11 76
 p.86.14–17 67
 p.86.20 64
 p.88.1–2 73
 p.88.2–19 67
 p.90.1–2 67
 p.100.14–20 84
 p.102.1–3 84

The Life of Thecla (*VThec*)

- ch.2.17–22 31
 ch.12.5 20
 ch.12.57–62 37
 ch.12.61 37
 ch.12.33 31
 ch.19.5 20
 ch.21.34 20
 ch.25.17–21 92

The Life of Theodora
of Alexandria (*VTheodAl*)

- p.25 74
 p.26 108
 p.27 108, 109
 p.29 112
 p.40 116
 p.43 108

The Life of Theodora
of Thessalonike (*VTheodThess*)

- ch.19.8–12 169
 ch.21.2–4 152
 ch.22.12–22 153
 ch.22.26–28 156
 ch.25.14–20 154
 ch.27.2–7 154
 ch.27.36–39 155
 ch.33.8–17 156
 ch.33.19–22 156
 ch.36.10–13 129
 ch.37.27–31 152
 ch.39.1–4 159
 ch.39.4–15 160
 ch.39.19–23 160
 ch.39.26–28 160
 ch.40.18–25 161
 ch.59.9–15 186n.11

The Life of Thomaïs (*VThom*)

- ch.2 171

- ch.4 176
 ch.5 176
 ch.6 169, 172, 176
 ch.7 174
 ch.9 165
 ch.10 173
 ch.11 172
 ch.15 175
 ch.16 185
 ch.17 185
 ch.25 174

B. Other Texts*Apocrypha*

- Gospel of Thomas
 Saying 22 100
 Saying 114 100

- Sir. 3.12–14 152

- Gregory the Cleric, *Translation
of St. Theodora's Relics* ch.20 133

- Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate*
14.1.1–15 55

- Gregory of Nyssa, *Encomium
in Stephanum Protomartyrem*
704.11 21

- Hyginus, *Fabulae* CXC 99n.7

- John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Mat.*
69.4 14

- John Chrysostom, *Hom. in I Tim.*
14.3 14

John Chrysostom, *De virginitate*5.2.17–19 **54**6.1.13–14 **54**

New Testament

Mt.

6.24 **146, 149**16.25 **101**

Mk.

8.33 **174**8.34–35 **101**

Lk.

7.37–38 **81**13.21 **114**14.11 **147**14.25–26 **101**14.26–27 **168**16.13 **146, 149**18.13 **70**

Jn.

4.8–26 **28**

Acts

9.1–19 **78**

1 Cor.

2.9 **139**3.18–19 **100**5 **171**7.16 **175**7.34 **170**

Eph.

5.22–24 **170**5.23 **178**

1 Tim.

2.15 **177n.8**

Heb.

12.14 **147**

James

1.17 **173**

1Pet.

3.7 **155**

Old Testament

Gen.

3.16 **179**

Deut.

22.5 **109**

Ps.

84.10 **165**116.3 **173**141.4 **190**

Is.

26.11 **147**49.15 **151**

Ezek.

33.11 **78**Origen, *Exhortatio**in martyrium* 18.24–27 **21**Ovid, *Metamorphoses*IX.666–797 **99n.7**Photios, *Epistulae* 234.36–41 **13n.3**Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia**Religiosa* 30.7.5–10 **15**

General Index

Aalen, S. 78n.11

Abelianos, in *PIr* 24

Aegina 131, 133, 169, 185n.9

Agape, Irene and Chione, Sts. 23, 24,
32, 33, 43, 44n.7Agapios, in *VEuphr* 94, 122, 123

Agapitos, P. A. 13n.3, 30, 42n.5, 68

Agnes, St. 23, 24, 37–39

Alexander, in *PTat* 29, 51, 52Alexander, in *VThec* 29Alexandria 25, 59, 61, 66, 74, 92, 94,
98

Anastasia Patrikia, St. 92n.1, 93

Anastasia of Rome, St. 23, 25, 44n.7,
51, 54, 166, 167, 168n.4, 170n.5,
171, 175, 176, 179, 184

Anastasia the Virgin, St. 48, 131

Anastasios, in *PAec* 24

Andrew the Fool, St. 141n.7

androgyny 99, 100

angel 14, 26, 27, 42, 48, 57, 102,
139, 142, 155

Angold, M. 164

Anna, abbess in *VTheodThess*

151–156, 159, 160

Anna/Euphemianos, St. 92n.1, 93

Anson, J. 99

Antigonos, in *VEupr* 132Antioch 18, 22, 24, 28, 29, 34, 36,
37, 60, 69, 98

Antony, St. 15, 127

Antony, father of Theodora
of Thessalonike 133

Aphrodite 98

Apollo 29, 51, 52

Apophthegmata Patrum 18, 82n.13,
93

Apollinaria/Dorotheos, St. 92n.1, 93

Ardener, S. 162

Arsenios, St. 15, 137

Ashbrook-Harvey, S. 14, 15, 26, 31,
60n.2, 62n.3, 90, 131, 158

Aspegren, K. 90

Athanasia, St. 92n.1, 93

Athanasia of Aegina, St. 131, 168n.4,
169, 185n.9

Athanasios of Alexandria 15

Athos, Mt. 128

Aurelian, in *VEud* 60

Auzépy, M.-F. 97

Babdos, in *PIr* 39

Barbara, St. 23, 25–27, 32

Bardas, caesar 132

Barnabas, in *VMatr* 105Basil, author of *VEuthymIun* 127

Basil of Ancyra 54

Basilakes, Nikephoros 68n.6

Bassianos, in *VMatr* 95, 96, 101,
105, 107, 112, 114, 115, 119

Bauman, R. 14

Beck, H.-G. 13n.3, 20, 26, 61, 97n.5

Beirut 96, 119, 165

Bethge, H.-G. 100

Bible 14, 78, 100, 101, 159

Bithynia 128

Bloch, H. R. 108n.10

Booth, W. C. 144n.9

Boulhol, P. 125n.12

Brock, S. P. 14, 26, 31, 60n.2, 62n.3,
131, 158

Brown, P. 26, 100, 127

Bryene, in *PFeb* 26, 151–153, 158,
159

Bullough, V. 99

Butler, J. 50, 104

- Butterweck, C. 49n.10
 Bynum-Walker, C. 151
- Cameron, A. 54, 90
 Cappadocia 132
 Caria 99n.7
 Carlson, M. 17
 Castelli, E. 54, 90, 91, 100
 Catafygiotou-Topping, E. 95
 Catherine, St. 22–26, 32, 40, 41, 46–48, 52
 Cecilia, St. 175
 Charitine, St. 48
 Chitty, D. J. 127
 Christina, St. 23, 26, 27, 48, 51–53
 Chrysanthé, in *VTheodThess* 133
 Clark, E. A. 131, 145
 Cloke, G. 54, 55, 90
 closure 121, 122, 124
 Constantinople 25, 28, 93, 96, 97, 107, 132
 Constantinou, S. 11
 Constas, N. 95, 98n.6, 102, 103, 109, 115–117, 124, 126
 Coon, L. 14, 62n.3, 90
 Cupane, C. 68
- Dagron, G. 29, 166n.1
 d'Alès, A. 131
 Damascus 78
 Davis, S. 98n.6, 99
 de Beauvoir, S. 49
 Delcourt, M. 99
 Delehayé, H. 12n.1, 19n.1, 20, 24, 25, 61, 95, 98, 99
 Delierneux, N. 93, 98
 Delmas, F. 61
 demon 138, 140–142, 160, 161, 165, 172, 173, 187, 188
 desire 22, 34, 36–38, 40, 42, 46, 47, 65, 66, 68, 72, 78, 83–85, 87–89, 92, 106, 108, 113, 116, 117, 121, 131, 141n.7, 147, 149, 158, 161, 163, 169, 181, 185, 195
 devil 13, 38, 57, 65, 72, 79, 133, 141, 142, 154, 161, 172–174, 177, 180, 195
 Diocletian 26, 27
 Diogenes, in *VEud* 60
 Dion, in *PChr* 26
 Dioskouros, in *PBar* 25
 Dometianos, in *VMatr* 95, 106, 118, 119, 177
 Domnika, St. 131
 dramatic
 - character 140, 142, 177
 - dialogue 14, 32
 - elements 20, 32
 Duncan, N. 162
- Efthymiadis, S. 12n.1, 19n.1
 Egypt 60–62, 65, 75, 77, 82, 84, 128, 132
 Ehrhard, A. 19
 Eleazar 110
 Elisabeth the Wonderworker, St. 90, 131
 Emesa 96
 Enkomion 21, 191
 Ephesos 27
 Epstein, A. W. 164, 170, 191
 Eudokia, St. 60, 67, 72, 73, 78, 79, 82, 84, 87, 88, 131
 Eugenia/Eugenios, St. 92n.1, 93
 Eugenios, in *VMar* 95, 103
 Eulogia 95
 eunuch 61, 86, 87, 94, 113, 114, 164
 Euphemia, St. 20
 Euphrosyne/Smaragdós, St. 92n.1, 94, 95, 98, 102, 103, 106, 107, 109–111, 116, 117, 120–126, 168
 Euphrosyne the Younger/John, St. 91–93, 97, 98, 107, 110–113, 116–121, 127n.1, 128, 185n.9

- Eupraxia, St. 131–133, 153, 156, 157, 159, 161
 Eupraxia, in *VEupr* 132
 Eusebia/Xene, St. 92, 131
 Eustathios of Thessalonike 13n.3, 191
 Euthymios the Patriarch, St. 166n.1
 Euthymios the Younger, St. 127, 128
 Euthymios, in *VMarlun* 187, 188
- Farmer, D. H. 24, 27
 Featherstone, J. 95, 101, 106, 110, 113–115, 118, 119, 165
 Febronia, St. 23, 24, 26, 27, 30, 31, 36, 45, 131, 133n.4, 151–153, 157–159
 femininity 38, 53, 90, 193
 Flusin, B. 75
 Fox, L. R. 21
 Frend, W. H. C. 21
- Gaca, K. L. 59
 Garland, L. 164
 Gaunt, S. 62
 gaze 17, 36–38, 46, 121, 143, 150, 156, 177, 195
 gender 11, 22, 23, 32, 92, 104–106, 117, 126, 162–166, 178, 191, 196
 Genette, G. 44n.9
 genre 11, 93, 193
 subgenre 11–12, 18, 127n.1, 128, 193
 Germana, in *VEupr* 153
 Germanos, in *VEud* 60, 75
 Gerontios, author of *VMel* 131
 Goffman, E. 13, 16
 Gorce, D. 131, 141n.8
 Gregory, author of *VTheodThess* 133
 Gregory of Dekapolis 14
 Gregory of Nyssa 21, 54, 55, 67n.5, 90
 gynaikeion 164
- Hadrian, in *PPisElAg* 28, 40, 43, 46
 Halkin, F. 28, 29, 131
 Halsall, P. 165, 167, 172–176, 185
 Hawthorn, J. 17
 Heliopolis 25, 60
 Herrin, J. 164
 Hilaria/Hilarion, St. 92n.1, 93
Historia Religiosa 15
 Høgel, C. 19
 Holy Land 65, 77, 119
 Humm, M. 11
 hybrid 18
 Hyginus 99n.7
- Icarus 99n.7
 identity 12, 17, 22, 32, 35, 43, 48, 49, 53, 54, 59–61, 72, 77, 78, 86, 92, 95, 96, 98, 99n.7, 103, 104, 106, 108, 110, 111, 113, 114, 116, 118, 121, 122, 136, 162, 163, 177, 191
 ideology 54, 100, 170, 176, 177, 184, 189, 191
 Ignatios the Deacon 14
 Ikonion 29
 Ioannikios 128, 132
 Iouliane, in *PBar* 32
 Iphis 98, 99n.7
 Irene, St. 23, 24, 27, 30, 39, 45, 56
 Irene of Chrysobalanton, St. 15, 130–132, 134–144, 146–149, 157–160
 Irigaray, L. 162, 163, 165, 174, 176, 182
 irony 51, 125, 126, 141
 Isis 98n.7
 Issacharoff, M. 17
- Jacob 28
 James, in *VPel* 60, 61, 72, 75, 76, 86–88, 111
 Jerusalem 61, 86–88, 96, 119
 John, in *VEuthymlun* 128

- John, in *VTheodThess* 129
 John Chrysostom 14, 54, 55, 98, 140n.6
 John of Euboea 28
 Jones, R. F. 17
 Jordan 88
 Julian, in *PChr* 53
- Kalavrezou, I. 177
 Kale, in *VThom* 177, 186
 Karras, V. 90
 Kay, S. 40
 Kazhdan, A. 23n.2, 25, 28, 133, 164, 170, 191
 Kestillios, in *VThec* 31
 Kokolakis, M. 13n.3
 Kouli, M. 61–63, 73, 77, 83, 85, 87–89
- Lackner, W. 19n.1
 Laiou, A. 23, 164, 167–169, 178–181, 183, 187, 189, 190
 Langer, B. 78n.11
 Larson, W. 28
 Leo VI 166, 169, 170
 Leontsini, S. 72n.8
 Leukippe 98, 99n.7
 Leyerle, B. 14, 140n.6
 Licinius, in *PIr* 27
 Ligidus 98n.7
 Lucy, St. 23, 27, 41
- Macrina, St. 15, 67n.5, 90, 127, 130,
 Magdalino, P. 191
 Malmede, H. 78n.11
 Malone, M. 16
 Mango, C. 95, 101, 106, 110, 113–115, 118, 119, 165
 Marina/Marinos, St. 92n.1, 93, 96–98, 107, 120, 121
 Marina of Antioch, St. 22, 24, 28, 34–37, 56–58
- Mary/Marinos, St. 92, 95, 98, 102, 103, 108, 113, 115–117, 120–122, 124–126
 Mary of Antioch, St. 18
 marriage 16, 23, 27, 36, 94, 96, 98n.7, 106, 132, 166n.1, 167n.3, 168–170, 176, 189
 Martha, St. 15, 18, 133, 168n.4, 177, 185n.9, 186n.10
 Mary of Egypt, St. 15, 60–66, 68, 73, 75–78, 82–89, 127n.1, 128
 Mary Magdalene, St. 15, 81, 100
 Mary the Younger, St. 166, 167, 168n.4, 171, 177–179, 182, 184, 186, 187, 190, 191
 Massey, D. 162
 Matrona/Babylas 92n.1, 93, 95, 96, 98, 101, 105–107, 110, 113–121, 127n.1, 128, 131, 165–167, 171, 177–179, 184
 Maxentius 25, 26, 40, 41, 46, 47
 Maximian 22, 24
 Melania, St. 127n.1, 128, 130–132, 134, 141n.8, 145, 146, 168
 Metochites, Theodore 13n.3
 Michael III 132
 Michael II Komnenos Doukas 166
 Michael Maleinos, St. 128
 miracle 21, 27, 28, 31, 48, 56, 60, 94, 118, 126, 132, 133, 161, 173–175, 177, 184–189, 192
 Morris, R. 127
 motherhood 177
 Mount of Olives 61
 Musurillo, H. 24, 33
 Myra 29
- narrative 20, 32, 37, 38, 62–66, 72, 74, 75, 78, 89–92, 95, 105, 111, 120–122, 126, 138, 141, 144, 149, 150, 166, 174, 176, 177, 180, 182–185, 187, 188–195

- narrator 62, 64–68, 76, 81, 106, 144
 Nau, F. 61, 62n.3
 Nero 28
 Neumann, G. 17
 Nevanlinna, S. 25
 New Testament 28
 Nicol, D. 129
 Nikephoros, in *VMarIun* 167, 178–184, 187, 188
 Nilsson, I. 68
 Nisibis 26
 Nonnos, in *VPel* 60, 61, 69–76, 79–82, 87
- Old Testament 110, 151
 Olybrios, in *PMarAnt* 28, 34–36
 Olympias, St. 131
 Olympos, Mt. 128
 Origen 21
 Ovid 99n.7
- Palestine 93
 Papadopoulos-Kerameus, A. 97n.5
 Papaioannou, S. 13n.3
 Paphnutios, in *VEuphr* 94, 113, 121–125
 Paraskeve, St. 24, 28, 56
 Paschasios, in *PLuc* 41
 Patlagean, E. 30, 60, 92–94, 98–100, 133, 168, 170
 patriarchal society 49, 99, 106, 164, 167, 170
 Patterson, S. J. 100n.8
 Patterson-Ševčenko 25
 Paul, apostle 29, 31, 78, 170, 171, 175, 177n.8, 178
 Paul Silentiarios 68n.6
 Pelagia, St. 60–63, 65, 69–76, 78n.12, 79–82, 84, 86–88, 92, 93n.4, 98, 109, 111, 120–122, 126, 127n.1, 129
- Penelope, in *PIr* 27
 performance 13–17, 20, 38, 49, 55, 58, 64, 81, 82, 104, 111, 114, 117, 120, 122, 126, 130, 134, 137, 140, 153, 165, 173, 186, 191, 193–195
 Perge 95
 Perkins, J. 21
 Perpetua, St. 54
 Persia 27, 45, 179
 Petitmengin, P. 60, 62
 Philip, in *VSus* 93, 110
 Philotheos of Opsikion, St. 191
 Photeine, St. 24, 28, 40, 41, 50, 54
 Photios, patriarch 13n.3
 Pistis, Elpis and Agape, Sts. 24, 28, 40, 43, 46
 Platonis, in *PFeb* 159
 plot 12, 20, 24, 42n.6, 92, 107, 119–122
 subplot 44n.7, 121, 122, 149
 Poppe, E. 62n.3
 Porphyron, in *PAec* 32, 41, 47
 Pouplios, in *PAnastRom* 25, 175, 179
 power 25, 27, 30, 31, 37–48, 50, 52, 55, 56, 78, 82, 83, 87, 90, 111, 134, 141, 142, 162, 172–175, 177, 187, 191
 prolepsis 79, 179, 180, 182
 Psellos, Michael 13n.3
- Rapp, C. 15, 55
 Reinsch, D. R. 164
 Richard, M. 93, 95
 Ringrose, K. M. 164
 Rome 23, 25, 44
 Rosenqvist, J. O. 132n.3, 134–137, 139, 143, 146, 147, 149, 157, 158, 175
 Ross, B. 62n.3
- salvation 56, 61, 69, 76, 82, 84, 90

- 102, 103, 106, 108, 125, 130,
135, 143, 151, 154, 160, 175,
177, 181, 194
Satan 72, 97, 111, 140, 167, 174,
175, 179, 181, 182
Savor, in *PIr* 45
Saward, J. 100n.9
scene 17, 20, 30, 31, 33–36, 38, 67,
69, 72, 80, 81, 88, 111, 122, 123,
125, 138, 140, 142, 173, 175,
177, 180, 183–186
Schechner, R. 17
Schwankl, O. 78n.11
Selenos, *PFeb* 30, 31
Seleukeia 29
Serapios, in *VTaes* 61, 75, 82n.13
Sergios and Bakchos, Sts. 22
Shaw, T. M. 54
Sicily 96
Simon, J. 26
Simon Peter 100
Sinai, Mt. 48
Sophia, in *PPisELAg* 28, 29
Sophrionios of Jerusalem 61
space 85, 104, 109, 120n.11, 136,
144, 162–167, 174–177, 181,
182, 184–186, 191, 192, 194
spectacle 14, 21, 62, 64, 67, 72, 88,
142
spectator 14, 17, 20, 21, 26, 30–33,
36–38, 42, 46, 49, 67, 68, 81, 111
Stephen, St. 21
Stephen, in *VThom* 167, 174, 175
Straw, C. 21
sublime
- body 40, 43, 44, 53, 55, 195, 196
- nature 42, 48, 195, 196
Susanna/John, St. 92, 93, 98, 102,
108, 110–113, 115–118, 120–122
Symeon Metaphrastes 18, 19, 93n.2
Symeon Stylites the Younger, St. 15,
168n.4, 177, 185n.9, 186n.10, 187n.11
Synaxarion of Constantinople 93
Synkletike, St. 15, 18, 127n.1
Syracuse 27
Syria 96
Taavitsainen, I. 25
Tafel, T. L. 191
Taibbi, R. G. 96
Taïsia, St. 60, 61, 62n.3, 64, 66–68,
72, 73, 76, 78n.12, 82, 84, 87, 88,
127n.1
Talbot, A.-M. 12n.1, 20, 28, 60, 110,
128, 129, 133, 152–154, 156,
160, 161, 164, 167n.3, 169, 172
Tarasios 13n.3
Tatiane, St. 24, 29, 51, 52
Telethousa 98n.7
telling and showing 144, 145
Thamyris, *VThec* 29
theatre 13n.3, 14, 17, 20, 21, 55, 69
theatricality 20, 21, 23, 138
Thebaid 132
Thecla, St. 15, 20, 22–24, 29, 31, 37,
92
Theocleia, in *VThec* 29
Theodora of Alexandria, St. 59, 60,
74, 92–95, 98, 108–113, 115–117,
120–122, 124, 126
Theodora of Arta, St. 166, 168n.4,
170n.6
Theodora the Empress, St. 18, 132,
168n.4
Theodora of Thessalonike, St. 129,
131, 133, 151–156, 159–161,
168n.4, 169, 185n.9, 186n.11
Theodore, *PAnastRom* 25
Theodoret of Cyrrhus 15
Theodosia, St. 18
Theodosius I 132
Theodote, in *VMatr* 96, 177
Theoktiste, St. 18, 127n.1, 128

- Theophano, St. 166, 168n.4, 170n.6
Theopiste, in *VTheodThess* 133, 154,
160, 161
Theotimos, in *PMarAnt* 24
Thessalonike 24, 129, 131, 133, 151,
153, 155, 159, 169, 191
Thomaïs, in *PFeb* 24, 26
Thomaïs of Lesbos, St. 165–167,
168n.4, 169, 170n.5, 171–177,
184–186
Thornton, B. 68
tragedy 13n.3
Tyre 26
Urbanus, in *PChr* 26
Usener, H. 93, 98, 99
Vikentios, in *VEud* 60
violence 31, 32, 34, 51, 141, 178,
182, 184, 186, 194
Virgin Mary 15, 54, 61, 77, 82, 83,
85, 133, 173, 177
virginity 16, 22, 28, 31, 35, 46,
53–55, 73, 92, 168, 169, 194
Viteau, J. 25
Vivilakes, J. 13n.3
Vizye 180, 186–188
voyeurism 22, 36, 37, 195
Walker, R. M. 62n.3
Walsh-Makris, E. 62n.3
Ward, B. 74n.9, 82n.13
Wessely, K. 93
Wilson, A. 22
Xanthopoulos, Nikephoros
Kallistos 91, 97, 109, 112
Zosimas, in *VMarAeg* 61–63, 68, 73,
75–78, 85–89